

The Big Difference Between Cure and Healing

Shared 11-20

Based on Luke 17:11-19

Andrew Greeley tells a story in one of his sermons about a man in his early 30s who was diagnosed with brain cancer. He had a wife and young children and a promising career. Suddenly all of that was swept away from him. He could barely talk or walk. He was in constant agony. His friends and his family, except for his wife and mother, avoided him.

The doctors shook their head. It was too bad. He was a nice man and deserved a longer life. But there was nothing they could. Finally he went to a famous surgeon who offered to operate on him, even though everyone else said the tumor was inoperable.

The surgeon warned the patient could very well die during the operation, though he (the surgeon) was pretty sure he would survive and return to health.

They decided to take the risk.

After nine hours of surgery, the surgeon came into the waiting room, grinned at the man's wife and said, "Got it!" The man recovered and went on to a happy and successful life.

Twenty years later the surgeon died.

"We should go to the funeral," the man's wife said.

"I'd like to," her husband replied. "But it's on the weekend and I have an important golf tournament." (Adapted/Andrew Greeley, 2004)

Traditionally the story by Luke of the Ten healed lepers/outcasts, is used as an object lesson for 'thankfulness'. Very much like the story of the man with a brain tumor. But I want to suggest another added lesson about gratitude for this Luke-only story.

A cure is a recovery from disease; a physical fix. Healing is more. Healing is a restoration of wholeness. The Whole Life Center makes a distinction between the healing it offers and the definition of a cure. I quote from our own website;

Healing does not mean making painful or unhealthy situations disappear, but rather promoting healthy responses to all sorts of situations and conditions as they manifest in our lives. The Whole Life Center is not trying to "fix" people or cure them, but rather to help affect an adjustment or orientation to their circumstances that leads them to achieve balance within their mind, body and spirit. We offer pathways to wholeness for those dealing with life's transitions, joy and/or pain.

A cure comes from the personal and professional gifts of the doctors, nurses and other medical professionals and their support staff. Healing comes from one's spirituality which is their orientation toward life.

Dr. Peggy Way was my advisor at seminary. She is a very accomplished teacher and a great human being. Among her accomplishments she was the first woman to preach at the chapel at the United States Naval Academy. She was asked to do so because of her work in bringing people of many and diverse cultures together in multi-faith discussions. Dr. Way has a very noticeable physical characteristic. She walks with a profound limp and cannot move from place to place without crutches. She had polio as a little girl. She has lived with polio and its affects on her body almost her whole life. It has twisted her legs and hips. She was not so much cured of polio as she has survived polio. Despite the ongoing effects and pain she would talk in powerful ways about how she is healed, not cured, but healed. She would talk about her power, her joy, and her wholeness, and she could fill up the whole room with her gratitude.

This is the point of the parable. 10 human beings had leprosy and were cast out of life. 9 went on their way with their cures and re-entered their old lives. 1, and only 1, was cured and healed and re-invented a life with new possibilities because of his affirmation of all of life.

On the mural in the parlor are some of the Shadow Rock UCC theological foundation statements. The short phrases in their totality make up the metaphorical Word About Life that we are encouraged to embrace for ourselves and share with the world. In their totality they make up a life philosophy and a spirituality. We can decide to embrace them or reject them but the mural serves as a reminder of our core values.

Among the short sayings is, "All Is Good!" This saying stands as a defiant Word against the potential despair of human existence. It is not a moral proclamation about what is good and bad. Obviously, there are many bad things that happen in life. It is a proclamation affirming the truth that life, in all its complexity, joy, pain, trial, suffering, victories, striving, and resting, laughing, and crying is better than non-life. To use a fancy word, it is an ontological proclamation that Being is better than non-being even in the face of all that life is.

This orientation of faith, trust, and vision is the bedrock of an attitude of gratitude. This spirituality motivates the one cured person to turn around and return to the Source of Life and Love and give thanks. To stand in the affirmation that "All Is Good" is to stand in the fount of every blessing with gratitude. When we are there in our hearts and minds our hands are ready to work and express joy.

