

Healer of Our Every Ill – Part II

Mark 16:9-20 by Patty Friesen (April 12, 2015)

“They will lay their hands on the sick and they will recover.” Mk. 16:18c

When I confessed to some youth last week that I had plagiarized my Easter sermon from Ched Meyer’s commentary on Mark’s Gospel, they were very understanding and helped me look for loopholes to justify my behavior. They may have had some practice at this themselves. But I need to give credit where credit is due and if I am going to plagiarize, it might as well be from the best and Ched Meyers is the best biblical scholar on Mark’s gospel and has brilliantly walked us through these past weeks of healing stories. He is also a Mennonite peace activist, married to another brilliant scholar, Elaine Ens whose brother Gordon Ens lives across the highway.

Ched has shown us that Jesus healed in synagogues, homes, in public squares and even in a cemetery. There was no predictability, nor pattern or formula Jesus used. Sometimes he healed on the faith of the sick, sometimes on the faith of those who brought them, sometimes when there was no one else around, he healed on his own faith. Maybe it is faith alone that counts. Jesus used mud and spit, asked people to carry their mats, told people to bathe in certain pools. Jesus healed by touch but also by speaking a word long distance. The many varieties of healing in Mark suggest that no one way works all the time and Jesus displays a delightful creativity and even sense of humour in healing.

In the book, *Healing Words* by Larry Dossey, Dossey confirms that there is no one particular way that God heals. Dossey did some interesting experiments with prayer and healing. He formed two study groups with heart attack patients, one group was

prayed for and the other group was not prayed for. It seems a little cruel but the prayed for patients were five times less likely to require antibiotics. They were three times less likely to develop pulmonary edema, a condition in which the lungs fill with fluid. None of the prayed for group required intubation with an artificial airway inserted in the throat while 12 of the un-prayed for required ventilation. Fewer patients in the prayed-for group died. If the technique studied had been a new drug or surgical procedure, it would have been heralded as a break through. A hard-boiled skeptic wrote, Maybe we doctors should be writing on our order sheets, pray 3 times a day. If it works, it works!

Dossey also studied the effects of direct prayer or non-direct prayer. When people prayed for specific results, there were results but actually there were greater account of healing when people did not pray for anything specifically but simply held up their lives to God and let them go into God's care. It is the Quaker mode of prayer where people are held up in the light and care of God, without a specific prayer of how that person should be healed. It would appear that sometimes when we are so focused on particular outcomes of prayer, we may limit the multiple and creative ways that God works.

Dossey observed that the effectiveness of the prayers increased when the one praying was a practiced prayer, a person who prayed regularly. Dossey also discovered that distance did not affect prayer – that prayers were answered as readily by people who prayed across the world as they who directly lay hands on the sick and prayed for them. Dossey concluded that prayer is not simply an energy that goes out from us, but a Presence that is all pervasive around us and throughout the world. He also concluded the prayers are not sent up to God or bounced off God to the sick person like a satellite but an

all-pervasive Presence that is not limited by who prays, what is prayed or limited by distance or circumstance. There is no predictable formula for effective prayer. Rather prayer is a loving attitude which somehow releases healing. Prayer is a way of being instead of doing.

In Mark 6, Jesus sends the twelve to proclaim the message and cast out demons and bring healing. He told them to go out without bread or bag or money but to rely on the hospitality of those they served. Yet when Jesus meets us with them 20 verses later, they have both money and bread and Jesus knows it. They haven't been healing people. They have been out worrying about themselves and somehow have bartered for both money and bread but complain about spending either to feed the 5000.

They have been busy doing instead of being a prayerful healing presence and when a father asks them to heal his only son with seizures, they can't do it. They are like first year medical students or first year chaplain students who are overwhelmed by the illness. When they ask Jesus why they couldn't cast out the spirit, he says, this kind can come out only through prayer. First lesson for first year disciples: Prayer for healing is unpredictable. It is a mystery and no one know how it works or why it works or why it works sometimes and not other times. It is like any new medicine – the question isn't how it works but does it work? And for the most part new medicines or even placebos work because people believe they will work better than the old medicine. Maybe it's the same with prayer.

Help my unbelief is the most honest prayer for healing in the bible and Jesus honours our unbelief. We don't have to wait until we have more faith to start with

whatever we've got. We all have faith to some degree just to get up in the morning so let's start with that.

Even after all these weeks of talking about healing, I'm still not sure I have it all figured out. I come from a family in which every adult has a chronic condition except Patrick. My dad got Parkinson's when he was 50 and died at 63. My mom has high blood pressure, diabetes and osteoporosis. My sister in law has Lupus and I have arthritis and my brother and sister have Gaucher's, a disease of the spleen that comes from Mennonite inbreeding. So young people, please do not marry your cousins. Please marry a Catholic or something. Our future health depends on genetic diversity! What does healing mean for our family? While there are no cures for our illnesses, we are being drawn closer through our quest for healthy food and exercise and alternative medicine and there is some healing in that. We still have our struggles for sure. I like this quote...

Christian healing is a process that involves the totality of our being – body, mind, emotion, spirit and our social context and that directs us toward becoming the person God is calling us to be at every stage of our living and our dying. Whenever we are truly open to God, some kind of healing takes place, because God yearns to bring us to wholeness. Through prayer and the laying on of hands, through confession, anointing, the sacraments and other means of grace, Jesus meets us in our brokenness and pain and there loves, transforms, forgives, redeems, resurrects and heals. Jesus does this in God's way, in God's time, according to God's loving purpose for each person.

Because the Holy Spirit is continually at work in each of us, pushing us toward wholeness, the process of healing is like removing sticks and leaves from a stream until

the water runs clear. If we simply get out of the way of the Lord's work in us, we can trust that we are being led to the particular kind of wholeness God wills for us. Very often the results of our healing are increased faith in God and a new empowerment to love and serve others. Frequently we find that the very thing that caused our greatest brokenness becomes transformed into our unique giftedness, meaning that whatever we have gone through enables us to help others going through the same thing. Let us pray...

God our healer, whose mercy is like a refining fire, touch us with your judgment, and confront us with your tenderness; that, being comforted by you, we may reach out to a troubled world, through Jesus Christ. Amen.