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### God Started It: Healing

In the gospel reading from Matthew (4:23-25) which Al just shared we heard that toward the beginning of Jesus' ministry in Galilee, throngs of people who were sick came to Jesus and he cured them all. The same thing is mentioned in Mark and Luke but Matthew adds a description of the people as those afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics. There doesn't seem to be anything that Jesus wasn't able to heal. His primary motivation for healing appears to have been simple compassion. If the purpose was only to attract attention to himself or astonish the crowds we might think that could have been accomplished with one or two examples. But he healed masses of people. We are not told that he turned anyone away. And let this be clear here. People did not heal themselves, through their faith nor by anything they did. Jesus was the healer.

The New Testament is saturated with stories of individuals who were healed. We might have picked any one of them for the foundation of this morning's sermon, but this mention of how Jesus at least once cured everyone in general who was brought to him might be worth our attention this morning. After all, is that not who we are, everyone? Many of us might not feel particularly special much of the time, we might not think that if we were in a throng of people we would be chosen for a favor by Jesus. We are just folks. We don't often feel like we stand out in a crowd, perhaps we would very much prefer not to stand out. Nevertheless, in this passage, everyone received from Jesus the attention she or he needed. No one was left out. No one then, so dare we say, no one now? Isn't that a wonderful implication of this text? *...and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them.* All the sick. All.

It may be that healing has always been understood to be an extraordinary thing. Ancient civilizations commonly believed that an otherworldly power was always involved. Healing was the realm of priests and prophets and prayers. In ancient American civilization it was the sphere of the medicine men and their special incantations. In some societies disease was often understood to be demon possession or that God was angry with the sick person and thus a cure required some sort of spiritual application. The discoveries of science have moved us now beyond such thinking but I wonder sometimes if we have merely exchanged one naiveté for another? Have we in some ways exchanged a blind belief in the efficacy of spiritual incantations for a similar blind confidence in the capacity of scientific processes to heal every physical problem every time?

Consider the number of lawsuits against the medical community today. Is the thinking behind them that if someone is not cured then someone must have done something wrong? Is the thinking now by some people that science is God and thus those who practice medical science must be able to cure anything? What is too big a problem for God? Is the thinking that, considering the trust and prestige and financial remuneration the prophets of medical science receive for their efforts, when they fail they deserve to be penalized?

A friend of mine recently lost his father. The man was in his late eighties and died from a heart attack while away from home. He was lost suddenly, I thought rather mercifully, when considering what the process of death can sometimes be. Even so, my friend insisted that the physicians and the hospital his father used back home were incompetent and that if they had been wiser his father would still be alive. Well, maybe, but eventually an even more powerful force than the best medical science, the power of death, has its way with all of us. Or do we think that the god of science should be able to postpone the cessation of a human life indefinitely? For that matter, do we who have faith in the one true God, the God of the Bible, the God of Jesus Christ, the God of life, do we think that if we add faith and prayer to the applications of science there is no longer ever reason for the expiration of earthly living? Indeed, Matthew says that Jesus healed all who were brought to him. Regardless of the limitations of medical science, we people of faith might ask, especially concerning those most near and dear to us, why does Jesus not heal them all today?

What is needed is a faith to help us face the inescapable reality of death at some point, a faith in a Sovereign God who after all our best efforts still insists upon our ultimate physical demise but is even then still the God of love and life. What is needed is biblical faith, faith which believes that God knew what God was doing when creating human beings to live but temporarily upon the earth but that even as human lives are temporary here they spring eternal in heaven.

Now here is another paradox. Despite any of this thinking that one way or another everyone can be cured every time, we fail as a society to ensure the availability of decent reasonable health care to everyone.

Synod and Conference delegates and national church leadership in the UCC have long taken the position that universal health care should be a reality in America. If we can not cure everyone than at least we can bring everyone to the medical lieutenants who serve under the Great Physician's command. We ought to make health care as we understand it available to everyone. Now, finally, both secular political parties seem to be coming on board with this. Just how we do it is subject to debate. That we commit ourselves as a society to figure out a way is certain to most of us.

Is medical care a right? Well, if someone has, say, a broken leg and is in pain, and around the corner is a hospital where there is someone who can set that leg and administer medication to relieve the pain, what do you think? Does that person have a right to that care?

A while ago I might have concluded that I don't think so. I might have concluded that a person has a right to breathe, a right to liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and a right to life not aggressively interrupted by anyone. But now I carry that thinking further. Now I wonder if it is such a stretch to understand the physical right to life as the right to have it saved and renewed and restored for everyone when the means for that are available to anyone.

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