

HEALING

I'll bet a lot of preachers this morning are still fired up by Presiding Bishop Curry's sermon on love at the royal wedding – the redemptive power of love to change the world. Imagine millions of people hearing that message – so simple, and yet so earth-shaking. Jesus' message of love – the redemptive power of love.

Healing was a very important part of Jesus' ministry of love – nearly one-fifth of the Gospel material is devoted to physical or mental healing. In today's Gospel reading Jesus goes into the synagogue on the Sabbath and heals the man with a withered hand. As we heard in the Old Testament reading, the Jewish Law said there was to be no work on the Sabbath, and healing was considered work. The Pharisees were watching Jesus closely, trying to arrest him as a law-breaker, so Jesus says to them, "Is it lawful to do good or to do harm on the Sabbath, to save life or to kill?" Is it lawful to show love by healing someone on the Sabbath? Which is more important, healing someone or obeying the law? Which is more important if you're driving an ambulance, getting someone to the hospital as quickly as possible or stopping for a red light? Here as in other instances, Jesus makes it very clear that people are more important than principles – people are more important than principles.

The same thing had just happened as Jesus and the disciples were going through the grainfields on the Sabbath – the disciples were hungry and began to pluck the grain. When the Pharisees challenged Jesus, he reminded them of what blessed King David had done a thousand years before, when he and his companions were hungry and in need of food – they entered the Temple, the house of God, and ate the bread of the Presence, what we today would call the reserved sacrament. The needs of persons were more important than obeying the Law – or as Jesus put it: "The Sabbath was made for humankind, not humankind for the Sabbath." Love is greater than the Law. Love fulfills the Law. Healing doesn't take a day off.

God's will for all of us is health and wholeness. I firmly believe that, and the ministry of Jesus certainly bears that out. When John the Baptist sent his disciples to ask Jesus if indeed he were the Messiah, Jesus held up his ministry of healing as clear and emphatic proof. "Go and tell John what you hear and see," said Jesus. "The blind receive their sight and the lame walk,

lepers are cleansed and the deaf hear, and the dead are raised up, and the poor have good news preached to them.”

Healing was central to Jesus’ earthly ministry.

So let’s take a closer look at healing and health. The word ‘health’ is derived from an old Saxon word ‘hal’, from which we get our word ‘hale’ (as in ‘hale and hearty’), also the words ‘holy’ and ‘whole’. When we say ‘hello’ to someone we’re actually saying we hope they are ‘hal’ or whole -- complete – fulfilled -- holy. Health is wholeness, health is holiness.

And wholeness implies many parts working together in a unified way. The body is a perfect example of organic wholeness. Our heart, kidneys, lungs, nervous system, arms and legs, and all the other parts of the body, are designed to function together in a wonderful unity. If one part of the body suffers the whole body suffers. If you have an ingrown toenail your whole body knows it, doesn’t it.

Sometimes wonderful healings happen – when our prayers are answered. Sometimes it looks like nothing is happening. Not everyone is going to get well, as the world sees it. We’re all going to die sooner or later – the last time I checked the death rate was still 100%.

Sickness often seems so unfair. “Why is this happening to me?” we say. Or, “Why is this happening to my loved one?” But even people who die can die a holy death, peaceful and ready for the next step in their journey to God. And sometimes the miracle of healing is simply God giving us the strength to bear our infirmities, rather than to be rid of them. Look at Jesus -- there’s good biblical precedent for bearing our cross instead of getting rid of it.

Sickness and tragedy are not God’s will. We know that when we look at the life and ministry of Jesus. We know from the life and ministry of Jesus that healing is a sign of God’s kingdom. But the goal of healing is not the indefinite continuation of this mortal life. The goal of healing is to live a fuller, more godly life, right here and now, to be ‘at one’ with ourselves, our fellow humans, and our God -- today

Healing is no more magic than the peace and social justice and freedom from oppression that the prophets and Jesus spoke about – and no easier to achieve. All of these require the same dedication and commitment against the evil powers that separate us from God, the evil powers that God in Christ has overcome. That’s what we promise at our baptism, to work with God to overcome the powers of evil that separate us from the love of God.

The greatest healing miracle of all is not the indefinite continuation of this mortal life. The greatest healing miracle of all is the Easter story, God's victory over sin and death. The greatest healing miracle of all is the miracle of love, what Bishop Curry calls the redemptive power of love, that overcomes our separations and our fears.

We don't have to save the world and be the healers. God has already done that for us. Jesus Christ is the healer, and our job is just to help make that healing real, for ourselves and for everyone around us.

We come to God, and we ask God's healing for ourselves and for others, not to get what we may think is best, but to put our bodies, minds and spirits into God's loving hands. To be made whole and holy -- more effective instruments of God's healing in this hurting world. We pray "thy will be done," knowing that "the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases."

Come, healing God, and dwell among us.