



Jesus, Healer & Lord. Pentecost_7 SEW

The Seventh Sunday After Pentecost - July 19, 2009

"Jesus: Healer and Lord"

The Rev. Stephen Elkins-Williams

"And wherever he came, in villages, cities, or country, they laid the sick in the market places, and besought him that they might touch even the fringe of his garment; and as many as touched it were made well."

That is an incredible scene to imagine — people determinedly dragging out the sick and the lame and the blind to wherever Jesus was. They were drawn to Jesus like a magnet, because of the authority with which he taught them and healed the sick and commanded the unclean spirits. They had never seen anything like it.

And with hindsight we can say that in fact there never had been anything like it. This was not merely a powerful personality, a charismatic healer, an extraordinary leader. This was the presence of God among his people, the embodiment of the Divine love and the Divine power from whom all of creation stemmed, the fulfillment of all things, bringing that fulfillment and new life to God's people and to all of creation.

How are we to understand Jesus' power and authority? How is it that diseases and demons and even forces of nature, like the raging sea, obeyed him? Did he exert his will by superior moral force, intimidating whatever confronted him? Did he, like Dumbledore in a Harry Potter movie, draw up his full power of righteousness and intimidate his foes into submission? No, Jesus' power was not like that. It did not simply command from without; it did not coerce. Rather Jesus' authority, his Lordship, stemmed from a connectedness, a closeness with all under his dominion. His word, "Come out of him," or "Be still," his healing touch, did not merely overrule. Rather it was the soothing but authoritative word and touch of the mother who knows the very origin and being of her child and acts out of that intimacy. Just as the mother's authority stems not from how far above her child she is, but from how close, so too Jesus' authority was not imposed from without but emanated from within, from his intimate relationship with all of creation.

Remember, "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God; all things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made." Jesus was — is — Lord of all because all things were created through him. He is at the very heart of all that is, and all nature, in being true to itself, obeys and pays homage to him. That is how he can heal disease and bring new life and overcome evil — even today.

Half of Mark's Gospel, a total of eight chapters out of the sixteen, are devoted to incidents of Jesus' healing people's diseases. One of the ways the Church carries on his important ministry of healing, of bringing new life, is through the age-old sacramental rite of the Laying on of Hands and Anointing. We make that available at the Chapel of the Cross at most Sunday morning Eucharists in the church at the baptismal font during communion and before the Sunday evening 5:15 service. It is also available on the first Thursday evening of each month at the weekly 5:15 Eucharist in the chapel. In a brief sacramental encounter, the priest, utilizing ancient gestures of the Church, says to the person words such as, "I lay my hands upon you and anoint you with oil in the Name of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, beseeching him to uphold you and fill you with his grace, that you may know the healing power of his love." Any persons of any age seeking healing of spirit, mind, and body can avail themselves of this sacrament. You do not have to have a serious illness to put your trust in Jesus' healing power. Peter's mother-in-law, you may remember, suffered merely from a fever, and Jesus (Mark tells us) "came and took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the fever left her." No doubt many of the people in today's Gospel reading were not in danger of death, but suffering and in need of God's healing.

Do you need faith to be healed? If you are not healed, does that mean you did not have enough faith? No, although that is an excuse often used by charlatan “faith healers”. You know: “My healing power could not work because you do not have enough faith.” In many Gospel stories of healing, no one’s faith is mentioned. Some do not even ask to be healed. Jesus simply heals them. Sometimes we may think we have not been healed when we have. Not all healing is physical, of course, and even if we are not healed in body, we may well be healed in mind or spirit. In some way we will always receive new life from God, but that does not necessarily depend on our faith.

That does not mean that God does not call us to believe. In fact, any healing we may receive is a further invitation to believe in the Lord who rules from within, out of whom all life and goodness flow. Intellectual knowledge is not enough. Belief in God, trust in Jesus, obedience to the Spirit is required. Several times in the Gospel, evil spirits acknowledge Jesus as the Son of God. Recognition of Jesus as the Lord is not enough! Otherwise those demons would be saved and would not be evil spirits. But they cannot take the step God invites us to, which we promise in our Baptismal Covenant: to “turn to Jesus Christ and accept him as [our] Savior, ... [to] put our whole trust in his grace and love, [and to]... follow and obey him as [our] Lord.”

Many of us may never avail ourselves of the sacramental rite of healing, which is simply another means of grace made available to us by the Church, another gift of God to bring us abundant life. Healing comes in many ways. But we are all called to believe in Jesus, to follow him, to yield to his Lordship. Like the people of the Gospel, we are to go to him wherever we find him. We are not merely to be astonished by him, to name him but resist him, as the demons did. With God’s help we are to live out our Baptismal Covenant as his disciples following him as the Lord of all creation, who rules from within.

Mark 6:30-34,53-56