

HOW GOD HEALS

Preached by Douglas Morris in the First United Methodist Church of Palo Alto
August 14, 1983 James 5:13-18

When Jesus sent out the disciples, he instructed, "Heal the sick and say, 'The Kingdom of God is at hand.'" Jesus was concerned not only with the spirit of a person, but the body as well. A concern for the well-being of a person, for healing, and the manifestation of healing was seen as evidence that God is at work, that the kingdom of God is near.

Sickness has long been a concern of the church. All over the world, missionaries have built hospitals to treat the ill and training centers for doctors and nurses. The most recent development is the opening of Lytton III in our community. Today, we are experiencing the realization that God is more involved, perhaps even directly involved, in the healing process than we have believed.

How does God heal? Let me suggest five ways, using our text from James for several of these suggestions.

First, God heals through natural processes. In the final analysis, the body heals itself. Cut yourself and watch the body over the next several days fill in the cut, healing itself. Sometimes it takes the assistance and wisdom of physicians to diagnose, give antibiotics to kill enemy agents, arrest infection. Sometimes it takes a surgeon to remove a diseased portion, or put a bone back together. Medicine, therapy and surgery assist the healing process as the body heals itself.

Sometimes the poor old body has quite a task to stay healthy and to heal itself. We take our bodies for granted, often giving more attention to our automobiles than to our bodies. We know the oil must be changed, new filters installed, tune-ups on schedule; but we ignore the simple fueling needs, and rest needs of the body. When I read the sermon title in this morning's bulletin, I received a jolt. Reading across the page, the sermon reads: How God heals Douglas Norris. God has quite a time keeping me healthy. I confess to you that I don't exercise, take time to rest my body, or feed it properly. Dr. Michel told me yesterday in simple (he has to use simple terms with me), "Don't eat on the run. Sit at the table, put in a mouthful, chew it slowly and thoroughly. Give it a chance to digest properly." I have to have it spelled out for me. Take care of your body. It is the only one you've got. It's the only body you will have. Parts may be replaced, however! The body wants to be healthy. God heals through the natural processes, with the assistance of doctors, and your cooperation.

Secondly, God heals through prayer. Our lesson from James read, 5:14-16: "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the church, sick person... The prayer of a righteous person has great power in its effects." We are re-discovering in our time the power of prayer.

Jesus told us in the gospel of John, "God is spirit." In our culture, the term 'spirit' suggests ghosts or supernatural beings. Perhaps a better translation for us would be "energy". God is energy, a force, power, process. All of life is in motion, even the physical. This pulpit is composed of energy moving particles in constant interaction.

People have energy and emanate energy. When certain persons enter a room, the energy level of the room increases, or decreases. Some people add energy. Some people absorb energy. Some energize, some sap your energy. Have you noticed that some people drain you of your energy. When you have finished a conversation, you feel weary, drained, tired. When you have finished a conversation with an energetic person, you feel renewed, uplifted. Actually, we all have our days. Some days I have energy to spare. Other days, I am depleted of energy, and must receive. We provide that gift to one another, sharing energy. Give and receive energy when needed.

God is energy. Prayer is the opening of oneself to God, and receiving the supreme energy. Prayer is uplifting, energizing, healing. When we calm down, focus on God, breathe in the spirit, and let God love us; often we find peace and healing. We feel whole, renewed, healed.

Intercessory prayer is the joining of your energy with God's energy and directing it to someone else. Intercessory prayer is the surrounding of a person in need with the combined energies of people and God. That force, when focused on a person, can be healing, renewing, saving.

Because God heals through prayer, we pray for persons in this service. We name names rather than praying in general. We focus all of our spirits on God and through God to the person in need. We also pray for healing in the chapel service following the weekly worship.

Third, God heals through touch, or the laying on of hands as it is called in the Bible. As you read the gospels, you will be impressed with the times that Jesus touched someone as he was healing. A man rushed into a drug store and said to the pharmacist, "What do you have for hiccups?" The druggist slapped the customer much to his surprise. "Why did you git me?" asked the surprised customer. "Well, you don't have the hiccups now, do you?" He replied, "I didn't before. It is my wife who has the hiccups."

But there is something healing about touching, and many people have the gift of touching. Their touch, their massage, is relieving, soothing, comforting, healing. In the Old Testament and New Testaments, it was believed that a person's spirit was transferred to another through the hands. In other words, energy can be shared with others through the hand. Hands were seen as the extension of persons. Moses laid his hands on Joshua and transferred his authority to Joshua. Joshua was filled with the spirit when Moses laid his hands. The energy obtained was exhilarating. Through the years in the church, laying on of hands has become confined to confirmation and ordination. In both ceremonies, authority is transferred from the bishop to the ordinand through the laying on of hands.

But, now we are seeing a rebirth of interest in the healing ministry of touching. Nurses are taught about the importance of touch. In our chapel service following this service we often lay hands on one another. It is a calming, moving, healing experience. When we close this service we hold hands during the Benediction and the singing of "Alleluia." We are communicating our love and concern for one another through the holding of hands. God heals through touch.

Fourth, God heals through the anointing of oil. James wrote in our lesson today, "Is any among you sick? Let them call for the elders of the church, and let them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord." Anointing with oil was a vehicle used by God in the Bible to convey his spirit or energy. I Samuel 16:13, "Samuel took the olive oil and anointed David...Immediately the Spirit of the Lord took control." Oil was also medicinal in those days. Then as the philosophy of medicine changed, oil was used as the symbolic presence of

God. The disciples laid on hands and anointed with oil.

Through the years of the church, anointing with oil was relegated to the time of death. About 820 A.D., the Sacrament of Extreme Unction was formalized. The priest was called at the last minutes of life to anoint with oil. The act lost any relationship to illness. Now today we are experiencing a rebirth of interest. Anointing with oil is a symbolic act, something like the water of baptism, indicating the presence of God, and the work of God in the person's life to bring about healing and wholeness.

Fifth, God heals the body by healing the mind, the attitude, the emotion, the outlook, the inner life of a person. Bible psychology does not separate the soul, mind and body. The Bible looks on persons as total, whole. Father Francis McNutt has written, "Nowhere in the New Testament does it say that Christ came to save souls; he came to save people - body and soul." Jesus knew, as we are rediscovering, that mind, body, spirit, and emotions are all interrelated, intertwined, and indivisible. This mornings' Examiner title: "How much does the human mind have to do with illness" illustrates our rediscovery of this truth. When they brought the paralytic to Jesus, Jesus forgave his sins. This surprised and upset the people, "We brought him to walk, not to have his sins forgiven." But Jesus knew that the man's problem was an inner one, one of attitude, guilt, shame, paralysis of the spirit. Jesus forgave his sins, and then said, "Now, take up your bed and walk." The paralysis was caused by a sick spirit. In fact the word disease expresses it well: dis - ease, not at ease.

Our lesson in James states, 5:15-16, "If you have committed sins, you will be forgiven. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed." A sick spirit, a negative attitude, wrong choice, hurts, grievances, bitterness, all may cause physical illness. How many are sick in body because they are holding a grudge, or won't talk to someone, won't forgive, refuse to be reconciled? How many churches are sick because they are crippled by unforgiving spirits and poor attitudes?

James well knew that healing is more than physical. The mental, emotional and physical are so interrelated, you can't have one without the other. And when the mind gets well, when the sins get forgiven, physical healing often results. God heals the body by healing the inner life.

One caution: When you are not healed, it does not necessarily mean that you are weak in faith, or not enough prayers are prayed. God is still God and is not manipulated. There may well be a reason you are ill, or incapacitated, or suffering. Healing is not your doing; nor your faith's doing; but healing is God's doing. Some are healed, some are not.

But, on the other hand, it is proper to expect healing. It is proper to seek medical advise. It is good to pray, to lay on hands, to anoint with oil, and to confess sins. For these are acts of cooperation with the Master Healer, that God's healing energy may flow unrestricted and free.

"H O W G O D H E A L S"

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