

Ninth Sunday after Pentecost
July 22, 2018

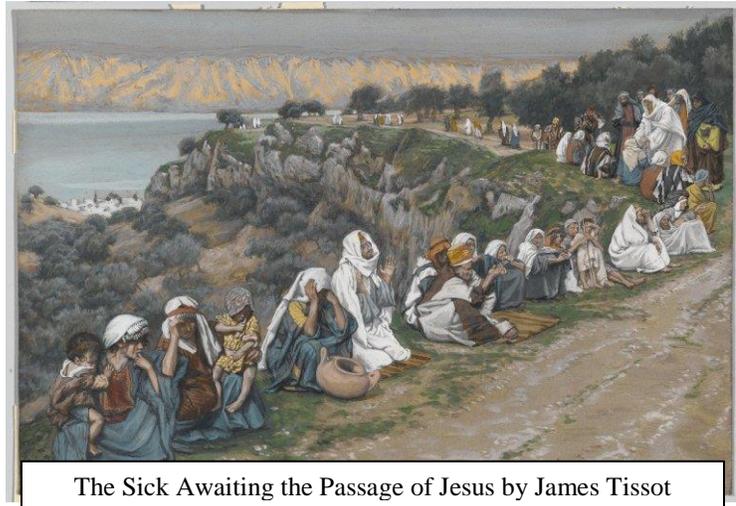
Rev. Nancy Lincoln Reynolds

Psalm 89: 20-37

Mark 6: 30-34, 53-56

Becoming Whole

“Stand still. The trees ahead and bushes beside you are not lost. Wherever you are is called Here and you must treat it as a powerful stranger, must ask permission to know it and be known.”—
David Wagoner



The Sick Awaiting the Passage of Jesus by James Tissot

How do you tell the difference between divine disturbance and a mental disorder...between when God is trying to get your attention through brokenness and a simple malfunction in your physical/emotional system? Barbara Brown Taylor proposes this question in her book, “Learning to Walk in the Darkness,” and says that anyone who is on a spiritual journey...and we all are whether you realize it or not...anyone on that journey needs help discerning this answer/figuring this out.

This discernment is necessary especially when the spiritual journey has lead you into darkness, and you cannot seem to find comfort or consolation, much less a way out (We have had several of these come to our attention this week). Sometimes relief is found by consulting a doctor who stabilizes your physical condition or brain chemistry with meds, but the journey through darkness continues even so. Taylor suggests that at that point one has to decide whether to surrender, or to resist, and that decision will largely depend upon one’s belief about God. And quickly, then, we return to where we left off last Sunday: brokenness is inevitable in this mortal world of ours and launches us off on what we may call a spiritual journey if we are people of faith. People of faith look for meaning more than “answers” to why brokenness or darkness happens as we said last week, and are inclined to wonder, “What is God doing with me now...” or, better still, “...what is God going to make of this?”

Last week we talked about that brokenness, discovering the meaning of the insertion of grim life stories into the midst of victorious and hopeful ones in Scripture. For example, the story of the beheading of John the Baptist by Herod was placed in-between the joy-filled sending of Jesus’ disciples off on missions of miracles and their celebrated return with talks of success. We concluded that brokenness...a deviation from an otherwise apparently predictable and familiar path...can interrupt a life at any time. You recall the Japanese art form image that I used, kintsugi, to visually demonstrate God’s redemption of us in our brokenness at those times.

Taking broken things...plates, pitchers, bowls...and honoring the broken places, kintsugi glues them together with gold, resulting not only in more value financially but in the creation of a unique and greater aesthetic value as well. This is, effectively, what God does with our brokenness...restores and renews us. Instead of brokenness being known by the suffering it causes, it becomes known by the good that God is able to bring from it.



Jesus models this over and over again as he responds to the crowds that come to him. Our bulletin cover depicts what that must have been like. I think we can discover more from these crowds of people overwhelming Jesus with their needs than just Jesus' popularity. Seemingly endless numbers of them recognize him, vs 56...and so they go to meet him wherever he is. How do they do that? How do they recognize him? Nowhere in the Bible are we given an image or physical description of the appearance of Jesus. Facebook was not around, so recognition of him could not have been visual. He was known for who he was and what he did: his teaching and his healing. In the New Testament, brokenness is known by the good that this man brought from it by way of restoring people to wholeness...healing for the sake of salvation. The same is true for us today, although we do not go down to the lakeside or mountain to meet him. We meet him for similar purpose though: by our faith and through our prayers.

Today's lectionary focuses us on what Jesus was doing with all this brokenness that was being brought to him by the people. Everywhere he went he was sought out and found. Even when he was looking for private time, quiet rest, the Mark text tells us, he was inundated with people.

Jesus' reputation for treating the broken is widely known. Notice I carefully used the term "treated" because, while the English translation will readily interchange "curing" and "healing," they are not interchangeable in the Greek. There are, in the Greek, different words for healing with different implications. For our purposes today I'll introduce you to three: "therapewo" which describes cure, a therapeutic intervention that removes the illness/brokenness; "iamai" references healing of the whole person by restoring balance in mind/body/spirit, not just the particular malady; and "sozo" translated as healed (which is in the Mark text we use today) which references salvation, being saved from evil, etc.

Where these distinctions become meaningful for us in our own brokenness (mental or physical or spiritual) is when we are able to understand the *difference* between being cured and being healed. Listen to this clear definition from Richard E. YaDeau: "Recognizing...the human being as a triune being that is composed of a physical entity, a psycho-social entity, and a spiritual entity; curing becomes that endeavor which rectifies a disease or a disorder in one component of the triune being, while healing addresses the integration of these three components into a single entity, and is independent of the extent to which an individual's physical body is cured."

One can be cured (disease removed/gone) without necessarily being healed (made whole). Likewise, one may be healed without being cured. (Death is the result of that). In our Mark text today, in that last verse, 56, we are told that Jesus “healed” even those that simply touched the hem of his cloak, and the word used here is “sozo.” Remember this word here actually means to be saved/to be kept safe and, in the Biblical sense, to be made well. No doubt in that crowd in Mark, some who were healed were cured as well, their dis-ease removed, but the primary healing action by Jesus was salvation and being made whole.

Perhaps the best story example of this is what happened to those ten lepers in Luke’s gospel. You remember...

Luke 17:12-19

As he was going into a village, ten men who had leprosy met him. They stood at a distance and called out in a loud voice, “Jesus, Master, have pity on us!”

When he saw them, he said, “Go, show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were cleansed.

One of them, when he saw he was healed, came back, praising God in a loud voice. He threw himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him—and he was a Samaritan.

Jesus asked, “Were not all ten cleansed? Where are the other nine? Has no one returned to give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Rise and go; your faith has made you well.”

In this story ten are cured of the physical symptoms of leprosy while only one is “healed” and returns to Jesus after his cure, instead of to the priests in town, who would pronounce all ten of them “clean,” and thereby returnable to society. Some commentaries see this as a clear bridge from an Old Testament to New Testament worldview wherein it is Jesus rather than the priests who grant admission to God’s presence. The tenth leper is declared “well” by Jesus (one of the Greek words...not therapewo...meaning to be saved). He is also told that it is his faith that has made him whole.

How many times have we seen illness cured or declared miraculous sometimes, and at other times seen people who have longed to be cured and were not? Lots. And it is painful. While we cannot make sense of why some are cured and others are not, the critical question has to do with healing: is there healing? Have the person and those who tend to him/her been made whole...saved, if you prefer that term...with attention turned to and focused upon God. Like the tenth leper.

Did you ever notice how, in the miracles that Jesus performs, he persistently points to the divine before he deals with the practical. “*Your sins are forgiven. Get up and walk.*” Or “*Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and then be healed (cured) of your disease.*” “*Your sins are forgiven. Stand up. Take your bed and go home.*” Pointing toward God is the consistent priority.

Finally, healing in Jesus’ sense obviously gives us more than meaning. It gives us purpose and direction and next steps. Frederick Gaiser in one of his articles about curing and healing tells us that a biblically based ministry will not demand a cure. It will recognize the importance, rather,

of turning to God and becoming whole. You see healing gives us so much more than cure. It provides a greater self-awareness and greater sense of wholeness which involves not just an emphasis on dis-ease but forgiveness. Healing...sozo...offers the movement away from brokenness and gives meaning to the individual, like we talked about before. While offering meaning to the individual via a greater awareness of Jesus and God's kingdom, it points an individual to the importance of community and participation in that kingdom. Biblical healing recognizes the spiritual dimension in life as a person is created in the image of God, AND calls for a response from that person...a turning towards God and the participation in community and outreach to others. Like the tenth leper, instead of simply being returned to society, we are compelled to return to community, equipped with newness of life and a message of salvation. We are returned to society to participate in it.

As we turn to the community, we do it in the same way that Jesus had compassion on the crowds. His receiving them as he did was actually a part of the healing process. And *our* willingness to receive others and to listen to others is, likewise, the first step in their healing. Deborah Van Hunsinger, assistant professor at Princeton Seminary, says that we should listen to each other and to everything that is said in light of God's purpose and calling, seeking always to orient each other to God who will provide for us. That is where true healing is: in our faith and reliance upon God through Jesus Christ.

Brokenness is real and, while being cured is always desirable, the person who can be termed "healed" is the one who has returned to the *greater* reality of the Kingdom of God/the community of God in Jesus Christ.