



## ST. ANDREW'S IN THE PINES EPISCOPAL CHURCH

SERMON

6-2-13

Intercessory Healing

“Who needs healing? I do. And I shall do tomorrow, and the day after, and the day after that. The complexities of healing match the complexities of my own body, mind, and spirit; the complexities of my thoughts, words and deeds, the complexities of every relationship in my past, present, and future. Christian healing is not just a flash in the pan, a magic moment; it is a way of life, a life-long process.”

These words were written by Anglican priest Roy Lawrence in the book, “Christian Healing Rediscovered.” Christian healing is not just a flash in the pan, a magic moment – it is a way of life caught up with the complexities of our thoughts, words and deed, the complexities of our relationships, in the complexities of every part of ourselves and our way of living. Wow – that’s rather encompassing and a bit daunting. And yet healing occurs about us, around us, within us and has done for a long time.

A man in our gospel reading today is healed. From what we read – he is quite miraculously healed – without a bit of effort on his part and perhaps without a bit of faith either. What elements might have worked together to bring about his healing? There is much to unpack in this story we are told.

First- the man healed is a slave and probably doesn’t have much control over or say in his life. Yet he is valued and his master cares for him, cares for him to the point of reaching out to others to try and keep him alive.

His master is a centurion – a commanding officer in the Roman military. In other words, this unnamed centurion is a member of the occupying force in charge of subduing or having control over the lives of the Jewish people. As an occupier living in Capernaum – there is no compelling reason for this soldier to make friends with the people of the land. It makes more sense to consider that the centurion and the Jews to regard each other as enemies.

Yet when the centurion seeks help for his ill slave he seeks out Jewish elders, Jewish religious leaders. And he asks them to appeal to this Jesus he has heard about. We don’t know what he had heard about Jesus, but apparently he’d not met Jesus and the man was not part of his faith tradition. But when the elders speak to Jesus they say that the centurion loves them. What a telling statement – he loves them. So make note of love as an element in healing.

Another element to note is his humility. He is willing to accept help from someone he’s never met and to accept this help without making a show of it, without exerting his authority and demanding any type of performance. He is humble and willing to accept help.

Finally, I find it important to learn that he sends friends to meet Jesus. Not only does this centurion have a good enough relationship with the Jewish elders in the community, but he has friends that are around him and active in their relationship with him. They are willing to help him out because they are friends.

So this healing of the slave appears to be wound about with all sorts of relationship stuff. The slave is valued by his master, the Jewish elders would go to bat for an enemy occupier, the centurion reaches out to people that may be considered less than him in importance, yet he is humble and surrounded by friends.

Yes it is a miraculous healing we hear about today – but it is also a healing that comes from a word spoken from a distance. There is no mention of faith, there is no prescribed action taken for the healing, there is no involvement by the ill person.

This is a healing that might be spoken of through the cliché – It is not what you do, but who you know. Not what you do, but who you know. I've heard that phrase spoken in a negative sense when someone complains that someone less qualified got the position/job because of who they knew. But I have also heard that sort of phrase used as a statement of community – specifically in Wyoming. I remember when a New York woman moved into Cody. People said she was some sort of mildly famous model – quite beautiful and glamorous. But my parents said what she did would never matter as much as how she treated the rest of us. Would she treat us as friends and be willing to be part of our community?

Returning to the quote I read by Roy Lawrence – the complexities of healing match the complexities of who we are – body, mind and spirit, and the complexities of our words and deeds and our relationships. All of those things intertwine. So, the centurion was aware of his authority and power. But he had also paid attention to the people surrounding him and he listened and learned the stories of Jesus, and he was respected in his relationships. This healing was about a way of life – a life involving love, caring relationships, connections to the community in which you live and beyond that – being open to the new – open to placing trust in someone unknown and unmet. The centurion's trust wasn't in what he did or any of his own power, but in who he knew. And he placed his desire for intercessory healing in the hands of a stranger.

For this is a story about intercessory prayer – praying for someone other than yourself. The centurion asked only for a word from Jesus. Only speak the word and my servant shall be healed. It appears that the effectiveness of this intercessory healing came from the centurion's openness to the channels of God's healing grace. Openness in who he would trust and openness in who he would respect and honor. The wholeness he was seeking for another was also about wholeness for himself.

Returning again to Roy Lawrence – “Christian healing is concerned not so much with cures as with wholeness; with that harmony with God which helps someone to be more of a person than they were before, spiritually, mentally, physically. Christian healing lifts up the risen Christ not as a means to an end, but as an end in itself. We all need healing. We all need Christ.”

Intercessory healing – praying for others -this is healing in which we all can share. May the healing power of God come alive in all of us.

Thanks be to God.