



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

SERMON

6-9-13

Faith Healing and Miraculous Cures

Wow – talk about the ultimate in healing – two stories today of people coming back to life from the dead! That’s miraculous healing at its most dramatic. And one of these healings isn’t even done by Jesus – it is the regular guy Elijah who prays the son of Zarephath back to life. That could be you or I praying someone back to life. Can you imagine it?

If I think about it – I can imagine that sort of drama happening in the healing revivals or meetings heard about or watched perhaps on TV. The preacher or healer is calling people forward and they are miraculously healed – they stand and walk – they proclaim new life – they are released from pain. The miracles of faith healing.

That is the theme of today’s sermon – faith healing and miraculous cures.

During my chaplaincy program at a hospital in Omaha, I remember walking into the room of a woman who had just had surgery for the removal of her ovaries. As I stood near her bed she told me that she was in great pain but she was so happy. Now she could relax and heal because she had just learned that the lesions seen on her ovaries prior to the surgery were benign. There was no cancer. And she kept repeating, “I know I just had to have faith. I know I should have trusted but I was so scared. I just needed to have faith – I just had to have faith.” I let her talk on in this way for awhile, not saying much before I left her room. For I didn’t tell her that I had just left the room two doors down from her of a woman who was now being visited by the oncologist to discuss the prognosis for her future.

That conversation has bothered me. Did the woman whose biopsy was benign have faith? Did she have more faith than the woman two doors down? She told me she had been scared to death and she was talking about faith now that the news she heard was good news. What kind of difference does faith make in healing and wholeness?

I put forth two ideas for your consideration. One, we all have faith – absolutely. We all have faith in something or someone. Or several someones and somethings. Each day we make faith decisions. In the course of a day I probably place some faith in eating well as helpful to my health. I may be someone that places faith in walking two miles every day for health. Or faith in the medical doctor’s advice and prescriptions. Or perhaps in fondling crystals or essential oils, wearing copper bracelets, doing yoga or saying rosary prayers or just deciding that I know best

how to take care of myself. I'd guess that most of us are a mixed bag in where we place our faith. I doubt there is anyone that totally empties their mind and remains a still, static blob, saying, "My faith is in God, my faith is in God." God may be very important to us and an important factor in our self-care decision making. But as I preached last week – it is our relationships, and our connections, and where we place trust and respect that come in to play in healing. And I think it is fruitless, indeed destructive for us to spend time rating our faith on some kind of effectiveness scale. There – my faith have reached a five – now I am sure God will heal me or do whatever I ask. So, a pox on all people who have the audacity to say, "If you just had more faith so and so would or wouldn't have happened." It just doesn't work that way.

Because I've noticed that it didn't work that way in the time of Jesus' healing ministry while on earth. It is true that some of the healing stories include a line mentioning the importance of faith. In fact, we will consider one of those next week. But there are also as many healings that don't involve faith in Jesus or God at all as a necessity for healing. The slave healed last week may or may not have had some sort of faith. The same is true for the man and boy that are healed in today's stories. Or consider the man lowered on his mat through the roof of a house. Or the man born blind who has no idea who it was that healed him. Or what about the crippled man beside the pool at Bethesda? He certainly didn't have faith in Jesus. He was still whining to Jesus that he couldn't get into the magical waters because no one would help him when he was healed.

Right now I am suggesting that we throw out the whole idea of Faith Healing with the bathwater and that we be clear about the reason we are doing so. One, we are incapable of rating our faith on some barometer of adequacy or effectiveness. And it is fruitless for us to do so because, point number two, God can and will heal whenever and whoever God wants. God is in charge.

So, from now on, when talking about healing I am talking about Divine Healing – healing that involves the power, grace, mystery, and awe of the working of the trinity. This healing is miraculous and makes use of the divinity of God, Jesus, and the Holy Spirit touching our lives and bringing healing and wholeness. This is the inexplicable healing that is pure blessing and fills us with thankfulness. It is the healing that we have examples of Jesus doing over and over throughout the gospel.

There are a few things I'll share today about divine healing. One, it involves power. Two times in the gospel of Luke, the writer speaks of healing power. In Luke 5 there is the statement, "One day while He was teaching....and the power of the Lord was with him to heal." This is speaking about Jesus and indicates that Jesus himself tied into some power from God that allowed for healing. In Luke 8 there is the story of the woman hemorrhaging for twelve years who touches the fringe of Jesus' clothes. "Jesus said, Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." Now I think that this power may or may not be the Holy Spirit, but I do think that it must operate much like the Holy Spirit – always present yet blowing where and when it wants.

In healing services that I have been part of, I often feel or have a sense of that power. One manifestation of it is often a warmth coming into the hands that are laid upon people's heads or bodies. The hands are strangely warm with a sense that they have become healing hands. I have felt a healing power at times during prayer, especially when I am focused on prayers for healing. I have felt a healing power at group prayer services as people sing and pray and gather around

each other for the laying on of hands and prayers. This power is both awe-inspiring and mysterious and not ours to manipulate and control. Yet, this is a power available for us to tap into. Over and over in the history of the Christian church healing movements have come and gone. Great healers, probably people with a definite gift for healing, have been members of the Episcopal and Anglican churches. Agnes Sanford was a great healer and writer in the 1950's and Dennis Bennett was an Episcopal priest in the 1970-90's who led an extremely popular and far-reaching healing ministry from a church in Seattle.

But here is an irony and a mystery for us all – although thousands of people experienced miraculous healings from attending services with Dennis Bennett – his own wife and daughter both died from breast cancer, despite years of healing prayers.

And that is the second insight I have about divine healing. As much as I have spent time trying to figure it out, desiring to make use of it for my will and whims – I know that divine healing remains God's free and precious gift, inexplicable to our human minds. I can learn much about divine healing, I can accept it, believe in it, open myself up to it. But I can never be in control of it.

I do know that healing prayers work – like the stories today – sometimes in openly miraculous ways. And I believe that whatever comes through healing prayers is beneficial to those who pray and to those who are prayed for. For our God is a God of love and God's healing grace is always working together for good. No matter what results we may ever know or see, God's healing power is there knitting us together into God's life and a tapestry of wholeness and completeness.

Thanks be to God.