

When God Heals

Sooner or Later

Mark 1.21-28

February 1, 2009

My friend and I talk about how we want to make everything all right for those we love, and cannot. We sadly agree that it is a good thing that we are not God; we do not have to understand God's ways, or the suffering and brokenness and pain that *sooner or later* come to us all. But we do have to know in the very depths of our being that the ultimate end of the story is going to be all right.

- Madeleine L'Engle (adapted for worship)

The Reading

They went to Capernaum; and when the sabbath came, he entered the synagogue and taught. ²²They were astounded at his teaching, for he taught them as one having authority, and not as the scribes. ²³Just then there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit, ²⁴and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.' ²⁵But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!' ²⁶And the unclean spirit, throwing him into convulsions and crying with a loud voice, came out of him. ²⁷They were all amazed, and they kept on asking one another, 'What is this? A new teaching—with authority! He commands even the unclean spirits, and they obey him.' ²⁸At once his fame began to spread throughout the surrounding region of Galilee.

Prayer and Healing

Anyone who delves deeply into prayer soon realizes that it is far more profound and intimate than the simple recitation of prepared phrases or pious platitudes learned as a child. At its heart, prayer can transcend the realm of words altogether, and has to do more with resting in God's presence – simply being with God - and listening for God's discerning Spirit. Prayer comes in many forms, and anyone who delves deeply into the life of prayer and the spiritual life soon learns that healing comes in many forms as well. Today we will delve more deeply into both prayer and healing; thus, it is appropriate that we begin with prayer.

Sooner or later, God, we cry out for your healing presence in our lives. Through the din of confusion in the ER late at night; waiting to hear tenderness in the voice of an estranged friend; scouring the horizon for employment opportunities; or lying awake through the dark night of our soul. Sooner or later we cry out for your presence; this day we say, sooner... let it be sooner. Be among us sooner, not later; bring healing and wholeness sooner, not later;

illumine our spirits sooner, not later; embrace us in healing love sooner, not later. We pray in the name of the One who heals, and whose name we bless. Amen.

Healing comes in many forms. This realization once startled a pastor leading a spiritual retreat on prayer life. During their time together, she asked the participants in the retreat to share what their prayer life meant to them, if they had made efforts to strengthen that life and, if so, the results they had seen. One comment in particular caught her attention; that of a man who spoke with enthusiasm of a new vitality his prayer life had gained when his faith community made a commitment to pursue a deeper prayer life. The pastor was so struck by the man's testimony that she approached him after the session to ask about the impact this experience had on his personal life. Sure of his response, she asked about the many ways his life was now better, now flowed more smoothly, now avoided pitfalls and setbacks. She was surprised, however, when he responded that his personal life was not going so well. His wife had been diagnosed with cancer; his daughter's marriage was unraveling, but he was, he said, able to bear up with courage and hope, because he knew that he was never alone; because of his prayer life he knew that God was always with him, sharing all the circumstances – both painful and joyous – of his life. Healing comes in many forms.

Always Available

Healing comes in many forms, and we would be well advised to open ourselves to its full array because sooner or later, as Madeline L'Engle has reminded us, brokenness, suffering, and pain will come our way. If you are so blessed this day that you have no need to pray for healing - and I hope there are many such blessed among us - then look around and pray for others, because in our gathering today can be found not only those celebrating the beauty of the day and the goodness of God, but those struggling with illness or disease, dealing with estrangement, fear, loneliness, or addiction. If you have no need to pray for healing today, pray for others as earnestly as you would pray for yourself; because sooner or later it will be you; sooner or later we will all pray to God for healing and wholeness.

We can, of course, approach God as a divine candy dispenser in which we insert a few prayer coins and expect God to make everything all right; but we will be disappointed, because God doesn't respond to our capricious whims and desires. God knows, you see, that there is far more to healing than we envision; healing comes in many forms, and many forms, as meaningful as they can be, don't bring the simple healing we desire. It may be that physical wholeness is not possible in

your situation, but healing in some form is *always* available, and God yearns to partner with you, with loved ones, with health care professionals, to bring healing into your life.

Sooner or later we will all be assailed by brokenness and pain, and will pray to God for healing. It would be a mistake, however, to assume that we engage God in prayer; that we call and God responds; that we pour out our soul and hope that God is listening. It should be comforting to note that God always begins the conversation we call prayer, that God yearns to commune with us, and eagerly awaits our response to the invitation.

We have God's ear, we have God's heart; this is the good news today. God is ever and always reaching out to us, inviting us into the intimate experience of prayer. Sooner or later, we will all pray for healing for ourselves and for others. Perhaps we should pray sooner, not later; knowing that God's healing comes in many forms, and that God seeks to engage us in prayer that leads to life. Perhaps we should pray sooner, not later; knowing that we can commend ourselves to God's care, because while everything may not be all right today, the ultimate end of the story is going to be all right. Amen.