

Pastor Roy's sermon from June 9, 2013

Grace, Mercy, and Peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Healing. We have a lot of questions about healing. What are some? Are there some unhealthy attitudes toward healing in the church? For example?

What does it mean to be healed or to heal? Does healing have to be miraculous? Is healing a bending or breaking of the ordinary rules of nature? How is healing connected to our attitude toward ourselves and others? Is healing as much about our spirits and whether or not we are well inwardly? Is it even possible to be healed physically if deep sorrows, disappointments, and fears remain unhealed? Is the inward spirit the place where healing begins? Is there anyone who does not need healing? Can people be healed as individuals without the healing of relationships? Does the grace of God call ultimately for the healing of our communities, our spirits, souls, and, finally, our bodies?

Healing is very personal. Jesus and Elijah raise the dead out of compassion for the mothers of the dead. The raising of the widow's only son is as much an act of social justice as it is the raising of a dead man. Generally a woman in Jesus' day, who did not have a husband or a son, was at the mercy of her extended family. If they did not have enough food for themselves or simply did not care to share, she would be financially ruined.

Healing is free; there is no secret step-by-step process. Nobody asks Jesus to get involved. He observes a need. He feels compassion, stops the procession, takes hold of the stretcher, and commands the son to rise. By reaching out and touching the stretcher, he makes himself ritually unclean; but he is not concerned about crossing that boundary. Compassion trumps barriers and traditions.

Healing does not depend on some kind of strong faith. In the gospels, healing is not usually based on the faith of the healed. Sometimes faith is part of the conversation, but usually it is not. The people are brought to Jesus in hope, or even stumbled upon by Jesus, as with the widow of Nain, and healing is granted. In the Gospels the prerequisite for healing is openness to healing. That is faith. That is enough. Healing must be received and embraced for it to be lifegiving, lifechanging.

Healing is not just a simple cure. Healing is, as Paul puts it, that "all things work together for good for those in Christ Jesus." Often when Jesus heals, part of the healing is social—inviting people to seek healing in relationships. Healing does not make everything better, healing is courage to go on, meeting God in the painful places of our lives—refusing to give up. Healing is when we find God's salvation at work—even in unexpected places. Healing almost always involves not just individuals, but groups and communities and, like I said, relationships. Therefore, the first century Jewish philosopher Philo of Alexandria said, "Be kind, for everyone you meet is fighting a great battle." Healing is when we see through the gruff external appearance of our neighbor or a stranger and realize she or he longs for a deep healing which is not a matter of making a few symptoms go away.

Healing produces faith, not the other way around. Jesus and Elijah reach out with a healing hand first, and then they watch as faith grows. God acts on our behalf before we respond in gratitude. If we follow God's example, when it comes to neighbors and strangers, we are called to act first with grace and healing even before the other has a chance to respond.

By looking to and waiting with the always present Spirit of Christ's healing, we find God's abundant goodness everywhere we look. Let us seek God's abundance in our health, and as we as a church reach out to our neighbors and strangers alike. God is with us for healing and sending us out as healers. Amen.