

August 29, 2010

The Healing of the Whole

Healing of people is often a topic in modern churches that is frequently discussed from a variety of angles. It seems that many churches both ignore the fact that healing is important or the focus is totally and completely on healing. The types of churches that follow the healing or no healing ideas range across a variety of theological ideologies, all the way from Catholic to Pentecostal traditions. The concept of healing is often distorted and the focus of healing can be misplaced.

In our modern day society, I feel that the healing of individuals is vastly underrated. Often healing only refers to physical healing, such as the curing of illnesses. Most health care is totally focused on the physical healing, and ignores the rest of the person. There is hope, as some doctors and patients are learning that there is more on the table than just physical healing.

As Christians, we have stories of Christ healing people and helping those who were in need of care. The people that Christ healed ranged across the spectrum of the society that Christ was a part of in his time. Our scriptures point to healing with other people performing miracles and healing of the sick. I feel that these stories are the solid pillars of our faith story and it is important that we remember the work that has been done in the past.

Today, I want us to focus on the healing that can occur in our daily lives. To me, healing is not just about physical healing. It's about the whole person and the journey towards wholeness. I believe that healing involves physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual dimensions. These are all key in becoming a whole person in Christ. Christ himself was about the healing of the whole person, and his actions reflected that.

Physical healing is probably the most apparent healing that we can see. We can see that people have experienced a physical change, such as the healing of a bone or the healing of a disease. As a pastor and Christian, I often pray for the healing of individuals, that they may be restored to good health and can continue living whole lives. As a church, we often pray for those in the hospital and visit those who are in need of care throughout their illness or recovery process. We all have times when either we or those close to us were in need of physical healing. Physical healing is truly important and I will continue to pray for those who need care in their lives.

When I think of physical healing, I think of my pastoral care class that I took this past year in school. We discussed how to properly go about a hospital visit and how to be a caring presence when we visit individuals in the hospital. There was a great emphasis in making sure that we carried with ourselves the appropriate amount of thought for healing. While the skills we learned were important, I still felt that we were ignoring key aspects of the healing process. That was the springboard that pushed me in the direction of thinking of how healing can be a holistic process, where there are many dimensions of healing needed for a person. The person in the hospital bed has many areas that are in need of healing. That is where my study of emotional, relational, and spiritual healing came into play, and where I am interested in being able to provide the right healing under the guidance of the Holy Spirit.

Emotional healing is often needed when there has been a traumatic illness or experience. Traumatic events can wear a person down, where their emotions are simply worn down. It can be difficult to see where a person specifically needs care emotionally. This is where I thank God for those in the mental health care system. I recognize that these professionals can help people work through traumatic events or with mental illness. I believe that the Holy Spirit can be present in

these therapy sessions, helping people move forward in their lives and learning skills on how to manage emotional situations.

Emotional care is not just limited to those that I just mentioned. I believe that emotional care and healing can be attended by ourselves under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. During the school year I often have to learn ways to deal with heavy class material in a healthy way. For instance, the stress of getting assignments done and readings taken care of can simply wear a person down to nothing, particularly say on week 8 of a 10 week quarter. I reach a point where I feel that I can no longer handle any more work. Yet I turn to God and ask for him to be with me as work through my class material.

Another dimension of healing I feel that is important is relational healing. This is the healing that can occur in our relationships with each other. Throughout life our relationships with others are joyful for the most part, yet they can become strained. Events can occur or situations create strain in our relationships. It is when things are difficult in relationships that we can become bitter or angry with another person. We begin to think that our relationship issues are totally the problem of the other person in the situation. Relationships begin to break down, and we become discouraged or angry.

This is when that it is of the utmost importance that we pray for healing in our relationships. We should ask that we can settle disputes in the Holy Spirit and forgive each other for what has occurred. It is important that we appreciate the person for who they are in our lives. Christ asks that we forgive our neighbors and we should follow what Christ asks of us in these times.

The other element to healing that can take place is spiritual healing. I believe that this can be some of the most difficult healing in our lives. We lose sight of our relationship with God. We

can become angry with God or we can feel that we are being ignored by God. We forget to maintain spiritual practices and we forget how important our relationship with Christ is. We may even totally and completely walk away from our faith. These are actions that are very real to us as we go through life. Yet it is of the utmost importance, that we keep the focus on Christ in our lives.

When it comes to spiritual healing, I think of a time when I was a senior in college and I had landed in the hospital with a medical condition. Fortunately, I was receiving the physical care I needed and I had the support of friends while I was ill. However, I had become discouraged and I was angry at God for allowing me to have this illness. I was angry because I felt that I had done everything that I could have done to prevent this illness and this situation. Yet with all of this I could not shake my falling spirituality.

In all of this, the best healing occurred when I spoke with the hospital chaplain. He assured me that I had not done anything wrong, it was simply life that was getting in the way. The chaplain helped me begin the process of being made right with God. I was instructed to focus on God and to focus on the bigger picture. I was focusing too much on myself in this particular situation. Instead of rejoicing that I was being healed, I was focused on myself and being stuck in the hospital. I had to begin the process of being spiritually healed.

It took some time, but I felt that I had made my peace with God. I can now sympathize with individuals when they are facing hard times and feel that God has abandoned them. I know that God can rebuild relationships and make us whole again. By asking the Holy Spirit to descend and be with us and by keeping the focus on Christ, we can be made whole again and feel that we are on the right path with God.

So with all those dimensions of healing, what are we to do? Where do we begin? Where does this healing play a part in our lives? Like many things, we should look to the scriptures for our healing and look for guidance in the process of being made whole.

The passage from James is a clear direction of what we are to do when we are in need of healing. It states that in our times of trouble we are to pray and we are to seek out the elders of the church and asked to be anointed. But what does this mean? Anointing isn't something that we do normally in our faith tradition today. Yet I think we should reclaim this act as Christians in this age.

I believe that coming forward for anointing is the act of asking the Holy Spirit to become a part of our healing process. The healing is rooted in by placing oil on our foreheads. By being anointed we mark that we are a part of God's people and that we are asking God to be a part of our healing process. The act of healing asks Christ to be in our lives as we move forward in the process of being made whole. All forms of healing, all the physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual healing can begin with this simple act.

I have studied this passage in school many times, and I feel that what we are to do with this passage is a key component in spiritual life. This passage plays an important role in some church traditions. For instance, in the Church of the Brethren, an Anabaptist denomination, this scripture is at the core of their anointing service. This passage gives a direction for healing; it gives a direction on the commitment of the community to its members.

I believe the passage shows us how we are to bring our troubles to the community, so the community of believers can lift the person up who is in need of care. Take note, the passage states to not to take the sick person to a doctor, but to a leader in the community, specifically the elders. The healing does not begin with conventional medicine, but begins with the spiritual

healing of a person. It begins with raising the person up to God and anointing them in the name of the Christ. This shows how important the spirit is in illness and how important it is for the healing to begin with the spiritual community.

However, there is more to the passage than anointing. Many bibles title this section as "The Prayer of Faith" or other similar title. The reason for this is that prayer is a huge component to the faith and to the healing of the person. Prayer is one of our connections to God. Through prayer we can ask God's healing presence into our lives. Through prayer we can make known our ills to God. Through prayer we can begin to allow the healing process to begin in our lives.

In all of our types of healing, the physical, the emotional, the relational, and the spiritual we can lift all of our troubles to God. There is no doctor, no person, no one in the way of praying to God. With prayer you can open yourself up to the Holy Spirit to begin working within you to start the healing process.

Opening yourself up to healing not only allows the Spirit to begin working with healing, but it also opens yourself. Healing is not only between people or the spirit, but within yourself. Allowing the healing process to begin makes you more aware of what you need to do in order to make yourself a whole person. Opening yourself up allows you to begin the process of allowing the Holy Spirit to begin working within you.

The healing process is not only rooted in James, but other books as well. In John, Jesus states that like Moses raised a serpent in the wilderness so must the Son of Man be raised up in to begin the healing process. But why the image of serpent in the wilderness? The reason for that is that in the ancient world snakes were actually a sign of healing. If someone was suffering, and they had a dream of a snake, then healing would come. This documented in the ancient world, and the image of Christ being a serpent shows that he was a part of the healing process for

humanity. Christ is in effect the snake that we need to see in a dream. Now that goes against conventional wisdom, but the imagery enhances what Christ can do for us as a people.

The message here is important, because it shows that the healing process has already begun. Christ started the healing process with us all through the forgiveness of sins and the resurrection of Christ. Christ is there wanting us to be made right with God. Christ's ministry was about making people whole. By accepting the gift of healing, we accept the amazing gift of the eternal life through Christ.

So where do we go from here? Today, if you feel moved by the Spirit to begin the healing process, I'll be here to anoint and pray with you to begin the process. You are also welcome to remain in the pews and pray for the Holy Spirit to enter into your life and begin the process of healing. You are also welcome to pray for healing for another brother or sister in our community. If you decide to come forward, we won't judge you if you decide to do so. We won't judge you if you stay in your seats. As a church community, we are interested in your well being and that you are on the right path to begin the healing process.

We all have our struggles, we all have pain, we all have parts of us that we don't feel comfortable sharing. None of that matters today. What matters is that we love you as a family and want to see you made whole in Christ. Christ doesn't care about what you have done or that you haven't already started the healing process. All that Christ cares about is you and your well being and relationship with our Creator.

Take the first step, allow the healing process to begin. Christ is there waiting for you to take that first step towards a whole and complete life. The Holy Spirit is ready to fill you and begin the road to wholeness. Let the healing begin in your life. Amen.