

**Sunday, 30 October 2016**

[Christian Caregiving 5- healing prayer](#)



[Sirach 38:1-4; Psalm 147:1–7; James 5:7-20; Luke 10:1-12](#)

Today we continue our sermon series on Christian caregiving. Last time we spoke about caring for people who sin. Today we are going to talk about praying for people who desire healing.

Some find this topic intimidating because it brings to mind televangelists. Others dislike the topic because it is not predictable enough- we don't know when a person will be healed and when they won't be- there are no guarantees. There are no techniques or words that always bring a predictable result. It is a controversial topic for many people. And yet... it is a part of what we are called to do as disciples of our Lord. St. James writes, "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be

forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective” (James 5:14-16). We read about the ministry of the 70 that were sent out- Jesus instructs them “cure the sick who are there, and say to them, ‘The kingdom of God has come near to you’” (Luke 10). We also see this ministry of healing continue in the book of Acts after Jesus ascends into heaven. St. Peter and St. John were going to the temple to pray when they come across a crippled man begging. Peter turns to him and says, ‘I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.’ (Acts 3:6). The man is completely healed and this starts a huge controversy with the authorities. Praying for healing is part of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus, who of course was constantly engaged in healing.

Many of us also either have our own stories of physical healing or know people who claim to have received healing in response to prayer. No doubt God uses medications and various medical treatments and the wisdom of doctors and nurses and various other healing professionals. But, God also uses prayer to bring healing.

There have been some scientific studies in the area of prayer. A doctor named Larry Dossey wrote a book called “Healing Words” where he makes reference to these studies. As an agnostic medical doctor he came to the following conclusion after looking at these studies, “over time I decided that not to employ prayer with my patients was the equivalent of deliberately withholding a potent drug or surgical procedure. ... I simply could not ignore the evidence for prayer’s effectiveness without feeling like a traitor to the scientific tradition. And so, after weighing these factors for many months, I concluded that I would pray for my patients” (Xviii). “[T]he evidence is simply overwhelming that prayer functions at a distance to change physical processes in a variety of organisms, from bacteria to

humans. These data, . . . , are so impressive that I have come to regard them as among the best-kept secrets in medical science” (p.2). He believes the studies show that when lifting a person in prayer- with an attitude of empathy, love, compassion, trust, and gratitude- that prayer is effective. This doesn't mean that the results of prayer can always be predicted, but he found that the studies say that overall prayer has an effect. Of course there are still “sickly saints and healthy sinners” that show us that the spiritual world is a complicated place. For example, Paul had a thorn in his flesh that would not be healed (2 Cor 12:7). We live in a world that is often beyond our control, but that should not stop us from praying.

The fact that prayer doesn't always bring physical healing doesn't refute the fact that sometimes it does bring healing. We don't understand how it all works, but sometimes it works and so we should pray for healing while also understanding that there are deeper purposes that might mean healing will not always come. There may be a deeper purpose in suffering. Hemingway once wrote, “The world breaks everyone, and afterward many are strong at the broken places”. Mysteriously sometimes God can bring a deeper healing for our soul out of suffering that we would not receive if the suffering were taken away. The healing and strengthening of our soul might be more important than our physical healing. But, we have to admit that sometimes we see no purpose in suffering. It is deeper and more mysterious than we can understand.

Jesus performed some amazing acts of healing. He healed people that were born blind. We even read about Jesus bringing people back from the dead. The most famous of these was Lazarus, but there are others as well (Jairus' daughter- Mark 5; The Widow's son at Nain- Luke 7). Jesus healed people, but it is important to remember that eventually they all died. Physical healing is only temporary. So physical healing really only points towards a greater healing.

Jesus in his compassion and mercy is about healing the entire person, body, mind, spirit, ... but this isn't just a matter of healing the individual. Jesus also desires the healing of social relationships, which is why he places such an emphasis on forgiveness. Jesus' ultimate goal is to heal the relationship between the world and God. Jesus' physical healings (which are temporary) really foreshadow and symbolize that great healing.

In Jesus we see humanity as it was meant to be- he is the fully healed human being. This is God's desire for us as well. The church is ideally meant to be an instrument of God used to help heal the split between the world and God. It has been said that the church is not a museum for saints, but a hospital for sinners. We enter the church as broken, fallen, sick, and confused human beings, and through a variety of spiritual disciplines, and through the power of the Holy Spirit, and following the teachings of Jesus, we enter the process of becoming healthy. We see this healing most clearly in the saints (The feast of All Saints is in a few short days). They are the ones who have received the deep healing God is offering. They followed the way Jesus taught us and have been healed of their sin, and, being healed, show the Fruit of the Spirit- "love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control" (Gal 5:22-23).

The theologian Paul Meyendorff says, "the very purpose of the Church is to heal us, to restore the rift between God and humanity which is caused by our sin and leads to death. This is achieved precisely when we are united to one another and to God in the body of Christ, which is the church"... "Jesus Christ is here asking for nothing less than the healing of the whole world, all humanity, all creation. This is achieved when we come to know Christ, when we become one with him and with one another. Everything that the church does, all its sacramental and liturgical life, all its teaching, is directed at restoring the proper relationship between God and creation, which has been corrupted through our sinfulness. This

is the real meaning of Christian healing, and it involves the whole person, body, soul, and spirit.”[\[1\]](#)

With that ultimate greater healing in mind, we are called to pray for people. This can be intimidating for some of us, but I promise that, if you are nervous about it, it gets better the more you do it. You might worry about stumbling over your words, but that is okay. The power of prayer is not in the eloquence of the words, it’s in the One who is listening. In prayer, it is more important to consider your heart over your words. Silence is okay. John Bunyan said, “In prayer it is better to have a heart without words than words without a heart”. So if you are nervous about praying with someone that is okay. We were probably nervous about learning to ride a bike too.

As you are speaking with someone who is expressing some sort of pain, or expressing their need for help, you could ask, “do you want to pray about this?” or “What would you like prayer for?” Don’t impose, be polite, but they might be wanting prayer, and are nervous to ask for it. When you pray, be honest with God and pray as you would if you were speaking to someone you respect and love. God is your loving Father. Be yourself. Be honest about worries and emotions and confusion. Take your time. Allow silence to be a part of the prayer as well. If it feels appropriate, hold their hand, or place your hand on their shoulder. Ask God to bring the healing that is desired.

In the Bible God has called us to pray for those who are suffering, so, in obedience and love, we pray. We can have confidence that God hears and has the power to act. We also recognize that there is a bigger picture God is aware of that is hidden to us. We pray trusting that God will work to do what is best for us. Our ultimate greater healing is his desire. As the church, this is who we are called to be. AMEN.

