

## **Proper 25, Year B, 2018**

“He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

Connie was a member of St. Paul’s, Norwalk

when I was there as priest-in-charge.

She stopped me one Sunday and asked me

to go to Cleveland Clinic to pray for her aunt.

She had just been admitted,

Connie told me,

and was scheduled for surgery on Monday morning.

Her situation was dire.

She had two brain aneurisms,

and had no chance of survival without surgery.

Even with surgery,

her chances to survive were less than fifty percent,

and even if she did survive,

she would have to live with significant

cognitive and motor impairment.

So I went and I prayed—

very quietly, because her nurse threatened to throw me out  
if I touched her or did anything to wake her up.

She had terrible headaches,

and had just gotten to sleep.

So I prayed that Jesus would heal her,

I blessed her,

and then I left.

The next Sunday, a very excited Connie stopped me to tell me

that not only had she survived,

she was completely healed;

She had no cognitive or motor impairment

Of any kind.

“He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the  
mute to speak.”

I’m not sure we know what to do with a story like this

or even with the two stories of healing

in today’s gospel.

The Gospels are rife,

filled to overflowing with stories like this,

stories of Jesus healing individuals,

and accounts of him healing

“everyone who came to him.”

Jesus spent more time healing than he did preaching.

He commissioned his disciples to heal,

and they did,

and Acts of the Apostles has many accounts

of the apostles doing just that.

In its first three centuries,

healing by the church, in the Name of Jesus Christ,

was considered normative.

The Epistle of James says “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....”

But even by the fifth century,

Augustine himself was writing

that the age of “signs and wonders” was over;

It wasn't needed any more

because the Church had been firmly established.

Now this presumes that Jesus and the disciples healed people

as signs that Jesus was the real thing,

that the Reign of God was here.

While it is true that healings are a sign of the Reign of God,

I don't think that is why Jesus healed so many who came to him.

I think Jesus healed because he came not just to save souls,

but to save whole persons.

Healing, for Jesus, meant salvation.

He healed out of limitless compassion and mercy.

And he still does.

Jesus still comes to save whole persons and not just souls.

Healing, for Jesus, still means salvation.

Jesus can and does heal directly,

through the prayers of his church, through us,

and I've seen it, more than once.

“He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

I was interim rector at St. Andrew's Cleveland back in 2002 (?).

We were invited to prepare and serve a meal

at the Ronald McDonald's house attached to Cleveland Clinic.

When I arrived, I was introduced to a couple desperate for prayer  
for their young daughter.

She had a congenital defect in her heart,

and her parents had just learned that it was worse

than anyone had expected,

and now her doctors were looking at surgery,

the very next day,

to repair the defect.

She was three years old.

She was playing on the floor,

and while she was playing, the three of us

sat down with her, laid hands on her  
and prayed for healing.

Early the next morning, I got a call from the House's staff.

The parents wanted me to know that they were on their way home  
because when they had gone

back to the clinic that morning for more tests,

they couldn't find anything wrong with her heart at all.

I've seen it.

Jesus loves. Jesus Saves. Jesus heals, and all salvation and healing  
arise from his love.

There are a couple of things that need to be said

about the healing power of Christ before we go any further.

First, illness, disease, and the myriad ways in which we are broken,

are **not** God's will, God's first choice for us,

and God does not visit them upon us.

God's will for us is wholeness and health of body, mind, and spirit,

and God's primary response to our brokenness

is compassion.

When we suffer, God suffers with us,

and works, always works, to bring some degree of good  
even out of our brokenness.

That is redemption, and through Christ,

God is always working toward redemption.

Second, all healing, regardless of the means,

all healing comes from the healing power of Jesus Christ.

And he is an opportunist, who will use any means available

to bring about healing.

I believe that he heals directly in response to our prayers,

**and** he heals through physicians,

and nurses, and medical support staff,

through physical, and speech, and occupational therapists,

through psychiatrists and psychotherapists,

and on, and on, and on.

Jesus heals through any combination of these means,

like he did in the first healing story I told you,  
where Jesus use healing prayer  
and a talented array of medical professionals  
to save a woman's life and to make her whole.

Finally, I'm really not sure any more that there is such a thing  
as a failed healing prayer.

The faithful prayer of a loving community of Christ  
always brings the healing power of Christ to bear  
upon the person  
who is the object of that prayer,  
and that healing power will not be denied.

Whenever the healing power of Christ is brought to bear on a person,  
Grace happens.

It may be subtle, internal, hidden;  
it may happen over time, it may take repeated prayer,  
what happens may not even be what we prayed for,  
but Grace happens,

and I believe that the person for whom we pray

is changed, somehow transformed, brought closer to Christ.

But all of this does beg the question,

because healing through prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ,

simply isn't normative in the church any more.

The kinds of healing that are recounted so frequently in scripture

and the early church have become not normative,

but rare, infrequent, extraordinary.

And I, for one, have to wonder why?

The healing power of Christ experienced in the early church

is still the same,

God's desire for our wholeness and well being

has not changed,

but our experience sure has.

There's a whole history behind this that I won't go into,

but healing in the life of the church has gone from normative,

to being extraordinary and reserved to the prayers

of only the holiest among us, the Saints,  
to, much of the time,  
simply not being expected at all.

I think what I would call our modern world view  
has a lot to do with this.

The emergence of scientific method and a scientific world view  
has been a Godsend,  
and I embrace them.

They have been the source of healing and wholeness,  
and an easier way of life for billions of people,  
and they **are** a Godsend, because as I have said,  
all that is good comes from God.

But that same way of looking at the world has left us skeptical,  
questioning the reality of anything that we can't verify  
through our senses.

The problem is that the healing power of Christ is,  
at it's heart,

a mystery.

We simply cannot explain it,

quantify it,

or describe how it works.

It simply exists beyond the realm of scientific inquiry.

The healing power of Christ is not opposed to scientific inquiry;

Christ uses scientific inquiry, too, as a means of healing.

It is simply not within the realm of things we can know through

that way of looking at the world.

What we Christians can do is to recognize and accept the mystery

of the power of Christ's healing,

and as a community,

affirm its reality through faith,

And begin to pray for healing

with expectancy and hope.

Expectancy and Hope.

Because I think it takes a community of faith,

empowered by the Spirit, Who is always with us,

a community of love,

a community that works to make Christ's love

known in our world,

to create a space, a habitat, in which the healing power of Christ

can be manifest.

It takes the whole community of believers,

believing in the healing power of Christ,

praying with expectancy and hope,

to bring that power to bear

in the lives of the people for whom we pray.

The healing power of Christ is very real,

and very available,

but again, I believe it is more likely to be seen

In the context of a community

that engenders love among its members,

and hope in Christ's power to heal.

“He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.”

I want to tell you some of my own more recent experiences  
of Christ’s healing power.

One of the things I am quite open about  
is my own struggles with depression.

Depression is a cruel chronic disease.

It is disabling;

depression is one of the most common  
causes of disability in the world.

Depression robs people of one of their most precious capacities:

the capacity for joy and happiness,

and far too often,

it robs people of even the desire to live.

If I had to choose between chronic physical pain

—and I’ve known that, too—

and the unrelenting of pain of depression,

I would choose the physical.

I have struggled with depression my entire adult life.

My first serious episode occurred when I was a senior in college,  
and across time,

episodes have simply become more and more frequent  
and more and more severe.

At the beginning of 2005,

I finally had to leave active parish ministry,  
a life I dearly loved,  
and take a disability pension.

Until today, I have not worked in active parish ministry  
for sixteen years.

All of this changed,  
in a matter of weeks,  
last fall.

In September of last year,  
my long-time psychiatrist at University Hospital

was reassigned to treatment of inpatients only,  
and I had to find a new psychiatrist.

I found my current psychiatrist,

whom I will shamelessly plug,

Dr. Boris Royak of Advanced Recovery Concepts

in Beachwood,

by way of a whole rabbit warren of referrals,

and he was able to offer me

a relatively new treatment procedure for depression

called (hold on for this)

Transcranial Magnetic Stimulation.

I won't go into any details about the treatment procedure

other than to say that it worked;

it simply worked, where nothing else in my life ever had.

I have been completely depression free

for ten months now,

and I have to say that every month

has been better than the last,

I have done nothing but get better across time.

I have carried a tremendous amount of pain

across a very long time,

and now I am fundamentally living a life of joy.

By June I felt so well that I had a conversation

with Bishop Hollingsworth and the Rev. Canon Percy Grant

about returning to active parish ministry.

They were warmly receptive—stunningly so,

and this opportunity to share the next seven weeks with you

is the first fruits of that conversation.

Now my healing has had two components:

a treatment twenty-five years in the making,

conceived by a brilliant neurologist

whose name I don't even know,

and a tremendous amount of prayer,

both on my part,

and on my behalf,

especially by my much-loved parish family

at St. Andrew, Mentor,

where I have hung my hat

for the past sixteen years,

but it is no less a product of Grace

than if Jesus himself had stepped out and laid hands on me,

which, in effect, he has.

I know the healing power of Christ because I have felt it,

and there are two things I can tell you:

You cannot **not** be in the presence of Christ,

and Jesus heals. He heals.

Expectancy and hope.

Expectancy and hope.

I would urge anyone here who prays

—and I hope that is all of us—

to begin praying with those words in mind,  
because Jesus does heal,  
Jesus redeems,  
and Jesus always answers prayer for healing,  
perhaps not as we might expect,  
but always in a way that is transformative.

Also, just give me any excuse to pray for you  
and anoint you for healing.

If I don't have healing oil on me, I usually know where I can find it.

(Spoiler: Mother Rose Ann always keeps some in her desk.)

Prayer for healing has always been core to my ministry as a priest.

"[Jesus] has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and  
the mute to speak."

Let us claim it.