

Epworth Chapel on the Green
February 12, 2012
Epiphany 6

2 Kings 4:8-37
Psalm 142:1-7
I Corinthians 9:16-23
Mark 1:29-39

As we continue to move through the season after the Epiphany, we continue to encounter in our Gospel lessons examples that show us that Jesus is indeed the Light of the world, and that in Jesus the reign of God has dramatically come near to us.

We are shown that in the person of Jesus, the Kingdom of God is present, and Jesus embodies God's kingdom through three essential activities: teaching, healing, and preaching.

We've seen in recent weeks that Jesus enters the synagogue and teaches with authority, unlike the typical religious teachers of the day.

We've seen, and see today, that Jesus heals great numbers of people of all manner of illness and disease.

And we see, and continue to see, that Jesus spends much time proclaiming the Gospel and announcing the Good News of the Kingdom.

I think perhaps it's due to our human nature, but for whatever reason Jesus' healing ministry often commands more attention than the teaching and preaching components of his work. This is not a modern phenomenon. It was also the case

in Jesus' day. Near the end of our Gospel lesson today, the people are clamoring for Jesus, because they want more miraculous healings. But Jesus says, "we must move on to other towns, so I can preach to people there also, for that is why I came."

But there is no doubting it. Jesus' healing ministry is definitely a vital part of his mission, and his power to make persons whole is a significant part of his message that the reign of God is near.

This leads us to an important and inescapable question this morning. I've asked it numerous times in my own life, and I would guess that you have as well. The question: *If healing people is a vital sign of the presence of God's kingdom, why didn't Jesus heal everyone, and why aren't all Christians today healed of our diseases and infirmities?*

When Connie and I lived in Toronto, our friend Paul Fuller went to the doctor one day with a small lump in his armpit. Cancer. Our friend Paul was not even 25 years old, and been married to his wife Martha for just a little more than a year.

Many people prayed for Paul. We prayed that God would heal him. Here was a young man in the prime of his life. He loved God. He and his wife were serving God and their local church. His whole life was out in front of him.

But a few years later I drove to Columbus, Ohio, and on a warm June day watched as Paul Fuller was laid to rest in a Columbus cemetery. I remember asking God shortly thereafter, “Lord, I don’t understand why some are healed and some are not.”

Every one of you here today has had a similar experience in your life. You’ve prayed for someone, and that person was healed and got better. And you’ve also lived through times where you prayed fervently for someone, and that person did not get well. Ultimately, each of us must find a way to come to grips with the mysterious providence of God when it comes to this issue.

In the time we have left this morning, I’m going to attempt to answer the question as to why some are healed and others are not by framing the issue a little differently and trying to get us to think a new thought.

Now it is entirely possible that what you are about to hear is nothing more than the misguided musings of an old, confused pastor searching for answers where there are none to be found. If so, just shake my hand on the way out the door this morning and say, “thanks for trying, pastor!”

I wonder, though, as we try to wrestle with the issue of why some are healed and others are not, if we need to be more precise in our language and make a distinction. I wonder if we need to make a distinction between being *cured* and being *healed*.

Here's what I mean. People are not always *cured* of illness, infirmity, or disease. But if they are open to God's grace, they can and often do experience God's *healing*. This healing many times affects not only the afflicted person, but also that person's family or friends.

I came to this conclusion when I considered again this week the root of the term "salvation." The root word for the term salvation means "wholeness." And I began to ask myself, "is it possible to be made whole, to be healed, without being cured?" Can disease and suffering be an instrument in God's hands to bring about our *healing*, even though we may not always be *cured*?

As I thought some more about this, I remembered a passage from the book of Hebrews. In chapter five of the book of Hebrews, the writer is describing Jesus as our High Priest. In doing so, he says this:

While Jesus was here on Earth, he offered prayers and pleadings, with a loud cry and tears, to the one who could deliver him out of death. And God heard his prayers because of his reverence for God. So even though Jesus was God's Son, he learned obedience from the things he suffered. In this way, God qualified him as a perfect High Priest, and he became the source of eternal salvation for all those who obey him. [Hebrews 5:7-9]

Among other things, this passage reminds us that even though he was God's Son, Jesus suffered. And his suffering was a learning experience, a means of grace (though that sounds strange), to help him to fulfill God's will for his life.

I can't help wonder if our experience is not sometimes similar to that of Jesus. That is, when suffering or disease visits us or someone we know and love, it is natural (and normal) to pray that God will heal us, and what we usually mean when we pray for that healing is that we want to be "cured."

But in those times when a cure does not come, is it still possible to be healed? To be made whole? And is it possible that the healing actually comes *through* and *in* the suffering and affliction?

As we come to the Table this morning, we most likely don't have an answer to these questions. And that's OK, because sometimes God doesn't give us answers; he simply gives himself. When answers aren't enough or aren't to be found, there is Jesus.

Answers will come in due time. In the mean time, what we really need is *him*. He awaits you at his Table this morning. So come with faith, and let him meet your need.

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.