

Healing for the community of nations

A sermon by the Reverend Robert Bruce Edson, in Emmanuel Episcopal Church, West Roxbury, Massachusetts, on the Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany, February 4, 2018.

He gives power to the faint, and strengthens the powerless. Those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings like eagles, they shall run and not be weary..

Isaiah 40:29, 31

When Jesus heals the sick, he emphasizes that it is not he, but God who is the source of the healing. With little medical knowledge and treatment available in ancient times, people relied upon God's healing power to make them well and whole. Our gospel narrative today takes place while Jesus is staying at the home of Peter whose mother-in-law is ill with a fever. When Jesus takes her by the hand, the fever leaves her and she gets up to serve them.

The disciples continue to bring people to Jesus to be healed of a variety of physical ailments and mental disorders. In our own time, it may seem archaic to speak of people being possessed by demons, but those who suffer severe depression will tell you that it is like having a powerful malevolent force within. When therapy and medication enable them to function better it is like inner demons being driven out. As the disciples continue to bring people to Jesus he has to draw apart to replenish his energy before going on to other regions to proclaim the message of God's healing and reconciliation.

When it comes to our own health, we have to be proactive in seeking treatment to allow healing to work through modern medical science and skill. Physicians tell us that having a cooperative attitude and confidence in the healing process is essential. If you have ever had a serious illness and your stomach is churning, your body is racked with pain and you can barely perform the basic functions of living, it is a challenge to cooperate in the healing process.

Our standards of justice don't apply when it comes to our health. Those who live a healthy life style may suffer a serious illness while those who don't take care of themselves continue to enjoy good health. It defies explanation how someone with terminal illness is miraculously healed. It is by the grace of God that any of us lives a healthy life. The prophet Isaiah writes, God gives power to the faint and strengthens the powerless. (40:29) The psalmist writes, God heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds (147:3) and lifts up the downtrodden. (147:6.) The reality of our mortal nature is that we may experience illness no matter how much we try to live a healthy life. Because our time in this life is limited, we can't afford to take our health for granted.

Visiting the sick is part of who we are and what we do as Christians. It isn't so important what we say as it is to be present with them. Holding the hand of one who is ill and afraid with an encouraging prayer can do more than we realize. Timing is important when visiting the sick. It is important to know when to arrive and when to leave.

The ongoing debate continues over providing adequate healthcare for all Americans. The members of the U.S. Congress who are provided with their own government healthcare and who vote themselves a pay raise have the power to insure that all Americans have affordable quality health care. Other countries provide better healthcare than we have.

A serious concern among the elder population is their desire to remain independent while unable to take proper care of themselves. This is especially true for those who live alone. Signs of self-neglect include denial of symptoms of a serious illness, lack of care for personal hygiene and proper nutrition, and living in cluttered, unclean and disorganized conditions in the home. Other indications include self-imposed isolation, utilities being shut off due to financial mismanagement, and a reluctance to accept offers of home health services.

Our nation should be able to provide better healthcare than any third world nation. A recent survey by the World Economic Forum published in Christian Century magazine shows that if the world were made up of one hundred people:

- 86 are able to read and write
- 7 have a college education
- 70 have no Internet access
- 48 live on two U.S. dollars a day
- 23 do not have adequate shelter
- 13 do not have safe drinking water
- 1 is starving
- 31 are Christians
- 23 are Muslims
- 16 are not part of any religion.

Jesus came to heal the world from the oppressive forces that cause human suffering. He came to cast out demonic powers built on lies that create chaos. If we are going to have a better and safer world we have to begin with saving our own nation from being victims of our own oppression. The current emphasis on nationalism and isolation makes it all the more important that we all need to “think globally and act locally.”

Knowing that violence begets more violence and that corrupt powers inevitably end in destruction, we ask God’s help to heal our divided world by eliminating the threats of disease and nuclear destruction. It is not might that makes right; it is ultimately right that makes might. If we accept the call of the gospel to be makers of peace we have to work together to resolve threats to our safety and security. If God’s work is truly our own, then it is up to all of us in the world community to work together for peace and to end poverty, hunger and disease on a world scale. It can be done. A good place to begin is to get beyond limiting God’s blessing on the United States of America. We need to ask God’s blessing on the whole world.