

January 22, 2011: Spiritual Healing; Psalm 36: 7-9 & Mark 5: 24b-34.

I stand before you this morning/evening come from across the world. I have been in southeast asia for the past three weeks and as I said in homegroup meeting yesterday morning – this jet lag feels like my mind is over here and my body is there and my soul is still floating somewhere over the Pacific Ocean. I have been to the ends of the earth and back. I do have a lot to share and digest and reflect on this experience, which you will all be a part of – in this next sermon series whenever I preach. I am glad this sermon series is focusing on our healing God. Even in war-torn, poverty-stricken Myanmar, people told me many stories of healing that are meant to be shared with the church worldwide. For my first 10 days in the country of Myanmar, I stayed in a guesthouse room with two single beds. For the first days it was only me in the room, then one of the receptionists had the thought that I might be lonely and suggested I open my room to a roommate. So, as an attempt to practice hospitality in a foreign land, and realizing it just wouldn't be asian to not share my room with another, I lived with a Japanese woman who had come to Myanmar to receive power to heal. Everyday she went to a certain Buddhist temple, just right outside Yangon, where an internationally known Burmese Shaman practiced healing. Every night she came home and told me stories of what had occurred that day and the secrets of his shaman powers. During her visits she was joined by a woman from Switzerland who came seeking healing for her pancreatic cancer. Many people came to this man from within the country and outside the country in search of healing. She asked me, and in the Christian tradition are there shamans? Interesting question – what would you have said? I said, we believe Jesus Christ is our shaman and those who receive His Spirit all have the ability to heal and find healing through the power of Christ. Yes, this is what we believe, but is this our practice and is this our experience?

People go to the ends of the earth for healing. We all desire healing in our lives. But, here in Vancouver, perhaps we live and move and have our being as if there was no healing God, a God who desires and freely gives healing. This is our invitation in these next weeks in this teaching series, to recognize and open ourselves more to worship a God who heals his beloved broken world, even you and me.

We are in the second sunday in this series. Mary, introduced us last week to this God who heals, and encouraged us to open ourselves into a posture for this series, given in this prayer: “Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me and soften my heart towards who you really are and to your life-giving ways of healing.” Part of the reasoning for this healing series is that a prayer healing ministry team has been forming in our church – this last year and a half we have been meeting together, learning much and want to share this with our church. We are recognizing that God desires healing in all areas of our lives – these four words around the sanctuary break it down to what we have been focusing on – spiritual, physical, emotional, relational, although there is much more to be said about God's vision for wholistic healing. As Mary mentioned last week we will be spending time in teaching and time for receiving prayer each Sunday.

One of the people our group has been introduced to is, Francis MacNutt, a well respected american catholic priest who in the 70-80's has been a leader in reviving healing ministry (specifically in the North American church as churches in the majority world have different experiences with healing than we do). Francis has written many books on healing and says, “ My own experiences convinced me that divine healing does happen, and commonly” (19, Healing). I want to read to you a case study that his ministry did with the Arthritis Pain Centre in Clearwater, Florida....page 208...

Perhaps some of you think only of faith healers in the media to give a framework for prayer

and healing, yet Francis MacNutt has been administering many different scientific studies on healing and prayer to expand our imagination in this area.

One of the questions that comes up for us around this topic is how much faith is needed for healing. Do I have enough faith? We ask. Perhaps some of you have been accused of not having enough faith to receive healing or pray for healing for others in the past. I think this question often puts us in dangerous waters and directs our focus off-track. It is true there does seem to be a correlation between faith and healing - Francis writes that in his experience sometimes faith is present in the person being healed, sometimes in the person praying for healing, but he also says sometimes neither seem to have faith and God heals anyway. I encourage us to move towards releasing our questions about healing to God rather than calculating or concluding on our own - especially the amount of faith needed. Our tendency, perhaps to self-protect, is to want to manage things and come up with solutions for why healing does or doesn't happen, but I find these tendencies generally create very unhelpful responses. Naming these questions before one another and God is important and helpful, but let's be cautious about getting too quickly to the answers. We need to live with these questions for awhile and try to suspend judgement as we open ourselves a little or a lot to encounter our healing God.

In our scripture today, we meet a woman who says about Jesus, *"If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed."* This woman is unnamed in our story, and we read in vs. 27 that she doesn't dare confront Jesus face to face, but comes up from behind, shyly, secretly, not needing much - just the hem of Jesus' garment will do. She is in contrast to the person who has come to Jesus before her. A synogogue ruler, someone with status and position in society, he is named - Jairus. Jairus comes and speaks directly to Jesus, feels worthy enough to request Jesus come to his home, and asks Jesus to place his hands on his daughter in order for there to be healing. So as Jesus was following Jairus to his home, this woman who suffered an illness that has ostracized her and made her unclean in society for 12 years, asks for healing in a very different way. Francis MacNutt shares a description of faith given to him by someone who studied with a Jewish rabbi. What would Jesus have meant when he says to this woman, "Daughter, your faith has healed you..."? "Chutzpah" the Jewish rabbi says, without hesitation. "Chutzpah" is a yiddish slang word for "having nerve" "brass" or "extreme confidence in action." We would say a person who has chutzpah is someone who really goes for it! Now, this woman came from behind and didn't want anyone to even notice her, but Jesus named this woman as a woman of faith - someone with chutzpah! She was determined to act, she reached out for healing at all costs - for touching a rabbi or a holy man when you are unclean would have been against the law, yet she dared to seek the power of healing from Jesus Christ - even if only through touching a tiny thread of his clothes.

Jesus, in the end, healed both Jairus's daughter and this unnamed woman. In fact, over and over again throughout the gospels we read of Jesus healing freely and to all who ask in whatever way. Why is it that we find it difficult to enter into these stories of healing for ourselves and those we love? Why do we find ourselves not responding to our God's offer towards healing? Our topic today is about spiritual wounding. It could be that the spiritual wounds we carry with us prevent us from responding adequately to God's call. Spiritual wounds come in many different categories. 1). One could simply be distorted or lack of good information about God - perhaps many of us have been taught wrong theology and are misinformed about the truth of who God really is, and what God's kingdom is about. It could be that our minds need to be renewed. If we are living with the thought that God desires and prefers us to suffer, rather than God desires healing, we are living under a very dark wounding. 2). Secondly, for a lot of us our spiritual wounding may be based on

misinformation, but it is not cognitively recognized. We are living out of past experiences as children or teenagers where something taught or experienced causes a block between us and God. The experience could be a father who professed to be a Christian and yet sexually abused us. Or the experience could be that as a child we prayed for God to protect us from a bully at school and we were beaten up. Our experiences lead us to carry within, perhaps a God who condemns, a God who is distant, a God who is helpless to intervene, a God who loves others but not particularly loves me, a God who needs me to earn love, a God who remains silent. These distortions with our image of God get lodged in our spirit and we may not even be aware of them, yet we live out of these distortions, causing us to walk crookedly. Healing begins by asking God to make us aware of this distortion, to ask what the root of this distortion is, and to participate with God in correcting this distortion. We will be focusing on this more in a moment. 3). The third way of spiritual wounding that I want to bring to our attention this morning/evening is a wound from an experience in a church, with a person of religious authority or in a religious community. All relational wounds are hurtful, but when it occurs within the church, under the name of God, the wounds run very deep. These wounds may lead us away from God and community and faith and can often be lifelong damaging.

Let's just take a moment to reflect and notice what struck a chord within us as I spoke of these three types of spiritual wounds. Is there something that immediately came to your mind that you know is a spiritual wound in need of healing? Let's just give some space for God to bring this to the surface, a memory, a distortion, an experience that has caused unresponsiveness to a God who heals.

Lord Jesus Christ, we enter into fragile, vulnerable territory right now, we wonder what it is that you are desiring to heal. Bring now to the surface a memory, distortion, or experience that has spiritually wounded our relationship with you. What image do we hold of you that is not life-giving?

PAUSE

God, thank you for revealing this to us now...we hold these before you for you to bring healing.

The other scripture I want us to look at this morning/evening is Psalm 36: 7-9. These are our theme verses for this healing series.

Psalm 36: 7-9:

*How priceless is your unfailing love, O God!
People take refuge in the shadow of your wings.
They feast on the abundance of your house;
you give them drink from your river of delights.
For with you is the fountain of life;
in your light we see light.*

These few verses have jam-packed some very vivid images of God's love and counter our common distortions of God. The first image is of being refuted, protected, held. Often we experience in this life many times of abandonment or feeling left adrift and alone. The image given is a God who shelters. Another common lie we live with is a God who is stingy, as we witness the suffering of the world, we conclude God does not have enough love for us. Yet, the image given here is a house of abundance and feasting. The third image counters the lie that with God there is condemnation and guilt, the image is of a refreshing river, always rolling, alive, giving delight and happiness. The last verse helps us discern what is of God or not in the experiences of our spiritual wounding – does it line up with a fountain of life, does it allow us to see light or darkness? For when we bring all of our experiences into the light of

God, we may then see clearly and be healed in this light.

Healing comes when our wounds are brought into the light. Perhaps our spiritual wounds are lurking within us, we carry them to Jesus from behind, not really quite able to meet Jesus face to face yet, but even deeper than our wounding is a deeper longing to be healed, to be freed from our secret suffering.

Let's direct our attention now to what is behind us. We have already recalled something from our past, but now let us literally look at what is behind us (for those of you with chutzpah, turn around and look up) – in the back of the sanctuary we see the tree of life. This tree represents all of what Psalm 36: 7-9 is trying to say. A tree that represents God's unfailing love – it provides protection and shelter, all its colour and shape represent an abundant home and a place of feasting. We are told of this tree in Revelations 22 as well, a tree whose leaves bring healing, located next to a river of life, a fountain of light. Threads are coming from this tree and move all around the sanctuary, even touching the four areas of healing we are seeking in our lives, these threads are like Jesus garment surrounding us and touching all areas of our lives. The hem of Jesus healing garment trails long and deep. We are invited to touch even just his hem and be healed.

Invite: go to the thread and touch a piece of this garment.

Let's take time to pray about this now...

In our story, when Jesus was touched from behind, he stopped and asked, who touched my clothes? He kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman told Jesus the whole truth. Jesus stops for us, for this desperate but perhaps unnamed long-held experience within us, a spiritual wound we carry, and gives opportunity for us to share our whole story and pain and truth to him. Share silently with Jesus whatever has come to your mind and share your desire for healing.

Look towards the tree of life as I read Psalm 36 – listen for a word or phrase or image that can replace your memory, distortion, or experience. Receive this word...

Prayer.

If you desire more prayer you can remain standing and those from our prayer team will pray with you (or during communion?)

O God come to my help! Lord, hurry to my rescue!