

THE HEALING PRESENCE OF GOD PT. III

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LOCKBOURNE / OBETZ UNITED METHODIST CHURCHES

AFFIRMATION OF FAITH: 886

THE WORLD METHODIST SOCIAL AFFIRMATION

HYMNS: 62 All Creatures of Our God and King (v.1,5,7)

494- Kum Ba Yah

500- Spirit of God Descend upon My Heart

SCRIPTURE: Acts 9:36-42 NIV

In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!" Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them. Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called the believers and the widows and presented her to them alive. This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord.

A west coast newspaper woman happened to peer behind a bush and see inscribed on the cornerstone of a fashionable church in New York City the instructions Jesus gave His followers: "Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead cast out devils." On the impulse of the moment, she walked around to the side of the church to a door labeled church office, went in, and asked to see the pastor.

I saw your sign, she stated abruptly without any further explanation. "Do you?"

“My sign? Do I what?” asked the bewildered minister. “Are you doing what your sign says? Do you heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead and cast out demons?” Then, without waiting for the astonished minister to reply, she continued, “If you don’t you shouldn’t advertise.”

What do we think when we hear words such as our Scripture reading this morning? Do we believe it? Do we think its promotional talk like a used car salesman who stretches the truth, just a bit? Do we consider it things that might have happened in the past but not today? Do we truly believe the Bible is the word of God when it comes to the admonishment to heal? Do we act on that belief without reservation? Do we believe that God calls His people to be a healing community?

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus sends his followers out into the harvest field with these instructions: **As you go, preach this message: 'The kingdom of heaven is near.' Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.** (Matthew 10:7-8 NIV)

Preaching, teaching, baptizing, and healing were the four primary ministries of the early Christian church. Over the years, in a majority churches today, we have somehow lopped off a quarter of our commission and obligation to Christ.

So what do we do with these healing accounts found not only throughout the gospels, but throughout church and secular history? Some of us fear exploitation. Others are weary of some form of trickery or slight of hand. Some of us are afraid of the unknown, so we only follow the paths we believe we can clearly see.

Every ministry of Jesus is one that requires faith. When a pastor performs any sacrament in the church, it is by faith that God is present and active. There is nothing magical the pastor does.

When we invoke the presence and blessing of God, it is faith that assures us that He is here and active among us. Those who have active faith will see the result of the blessing. In baptisms and weddings we know the part we do, and because we are the ones who choose to cooperate, we feel safe in participating.

Some of us are teachers; not only in church classrooms, but in the words, the stories and the testimonies that we share with others. We repeat what we have seen or known because the experience or lesson has become an integrated part of us.

Communion fulfills our calling to receive and to remember. In receiving, many of us feel closer to God, because we know that we are directly following His teaching. But even in our participation and knowing, there is a prevailing sense of mystery.

If we are honest, we will acknowledge that everything we do in regard to being a part of Christ's ministry is a mystery.

God is a mystery. God lessens the unknown by making Himself visible through prophets, through revelations, through Jesus Christ and through the anointing of God's Spirit. All of these are a mystery. All of these also reveal the nature and will of God.

For the last two weeks we have heard Scripture that supports healing ministries and steps one must take if they are seeking a healing. But a healing ministry is not just for the one seeking a blessing. As a member of Christ's church we must open ourselves to an active faith that not only allows but also enables us to become an active part of God's healing community.

A child fearful of drowning reads several books on swimming; hears several stories of swimming, even witnesses swimming. He knows it can be done. He knows others can do it. He knows that science and nature supports this act without a doubt, yet there is still that inward fear of jumping in and beginning the steps toward swimming. "What if I drown?"

The same is true in choosing to follow the gospel imperative to do more than preach/ teach and baptize. To initiate this part of

our Christian walk we need to put our knowledge, and our faith into action. This is done in two simultaneous steps. (1) Believe It! (2) Do It!

If we anoint someone with prayer and oil and not wholly believe, we will receive just what we suspected; nothing. There is a wide chasm between knowing and believing. I can know of something but to be healed, or to be an instrument in healing, I must have a strong faith accompanying my words and my actions.

Have I ever seen anyone raised from the dead like Dorcas? No. But I have seen and known people who were clinically dead and brought back to life in an operating room. ALL HEALING IS FROM GOD. God can use whatever instruments and whomever He chooses to make the healing occur.

Like some of you, I have read those passages on healing. I have agreed that nowhere in the Bible does it say that the time for healing has stopped. But I still wondered.

In my second year of seminary classes here in Ohio, I enrolled in a 4 hour evening class held once a week at Asbury Seminary, taught by the President of the school. The title of the course said it all: “The Ministry of Healing.”

We listened, we talked we debated, and went through several levels of theological viewpoints. When all was said and done, the lessons boiled down to the basis for healing and the steps for healing which I have shared with you in these last two weeks.

The greatest point of contention was much like the one learning to swim. You can know it all, but until you experience it, you may never truly believe.

The primary lesson for me to learn was one that I’ve had to learn several times over in various topics and administrative decisions:

“It’s not about me.” I cannot heal. I can lead someone through the steps and share why I believe it is Biblically sound, but I am not doing the healing. ALL HEALING IS OF GOD.

All I need to do is to believe and to follow through.

In the class we learned about preparing people for a healing, but in nearly all my experiences on this topic, they were ready before I ever arrived.

In one church, a man was involved in a chemical accident and he was completely blinded. After two weeks of specialists and consultations the conclusion was unanimous: “You will be blind for the rest of your life.”

On my third visit to the home, his wife informed me that God wanted to heal him and it was time for me to get to work. I was a bit shocked, but over the years I’ve noted it is usually the women that know and that reach out. I really didn’t need to go over the steps too much; they were both primed and ready to go. We had the anointing and prayer that night, and the next Sunday almost the entire congregation stayed after the service for a time dedicated to his healing. Having never mentioned healing ministries to that church, I was surprised by how many were ready to participate. For the next week he began feeling a burning sensation in his eyes. The doctor said it was probably movement of some of the corrosive acid that got behind the eye. The next week he began seeing shallow images of light and dark. By the end of the following month, he had his entire sight back. All throughout that time, the church and his family was praying for a healing.

Now I know, some might say, he was going to get better anyway. I don’t believe that for a minute.

Last week I shared with you that in another church a member was fatally shot three times by a drive by gang initiation on the west side of Columbus. After several surgeries followed by several

more days, he slipped into a coma and the doctors told the family he had probably less than a couple of hours to live. The surgeries had not gone as well as they had hoped for. The young man shot was related to the church primarily by marriage to a member and her parents. I can't recall ever seeing him in church.

At around 3 in the morning, his mother-in-law called me to come down to Mt.Carmel, and bring the oil with me. Actually it was more of an order, than a request.

I arrived about 3:40 in the morning and began to explain some principles of healing. She grabbed me by the arm, firmly walked me to the double doors of the intensive care unit and said, "Stop talking and get in there and do what you're supposed to do!" At that moment I was thankful she wasn't allowed to follow me through those doors. I checked with the nurses at the desk. They told me they were giving him meds to make him comfortable but they didn't expect him to make it to morning. I had worked in a hospital long enough to read most of those machines he was hooked up to, and the perspective results looked very poor.

We had an extended time of prayer. I knew without a doubt that the entire family (now living for the past two days in the waiting room) was doing the same.

In the course of about twenty minutes, his vital signs stopped declining. The nurse who was continually stepping in every five minutes noticed me looking up at the monitors. She said, "They do that sometimes, don't get your hopes up."

I eventually returned to the waiting room, shared my observation and prayed with the family. After an hour or so I went back in to the ICU and immediately noted that his vital signs had greatly improved.

About nine o'clock that morning, the staff announced that it appeared he was going to live, but there was a great chance due to the damage caused by the bullets, that he might not be able to think, speak or respond. Walking would defiantly be out of the question. The family kept vigil.

By that evening he came out of his coma and three days later he was sent to a step down unit. The physical therapists worked with him for several days before they transferred him to OSU. Four weeks later, he walked out of the hospital; seeing, hearing and clearly thinking.

I have noted with those and several other cases, my presence was almost an afterthought. The families felt instinctively that a healing was before them. They needed to claim it. I'm convinced that one mother could have done it all entirely without me.

Over the years I've noted it is the strong conviction and steadfast belief that enables this form of healing to occur. ALL HEALING IS FROM GOD.

We are a part of the body of Christ.
We are called to be ministers of Christ- not just the pastor.
We are called to be active in all forms of ministry.
For the last three sermons, we have heard but one.

Know that God dispenses gifts to whomever he chooses. They belong to him. In our life they may come and go, or change completely. God is the giver of all good gifts. As they come into our life, we are called to exercise them in the community of faith about us.

Our world is in need of the healing presence of God. This is not always found in near death experiences. The greatest healing that is needed in the greatest abundance is the healing of damaged emotions.

Matthew 8 tells us that "He took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses." Infirmities is an interesting word. It lives somewhere between sickness and lies. Not lies that we tell to one another, but rather, lies that we choose to harbor; about ourselves, others, our

potentials and our dreams. Infirmities then, is a kind of poison that resides in our minds and pollutes our souls.

The child who is told by an abusive parent, “you’re just stupid,” young girl who is teased and taunted by schoolyard boys, being told she is ugly or unwanted, or a young man being told that he will never amount to anything; all of these collectively, living down to the expectation or curse that was placed upon them because, for whatever reason, they chose in some great or small way, to believe the lie that was planted into their life.

Sticks and stones may break your bones, and words can most defiantly hurt you.

Each and every one of us is predisposed to certain traits and characteristics that are a part of our genetic heritage. Our hair color, our body type, our propensity to certain diseases or illnesses, is all a part of our natural biological chemistry.

Yet predisposition is not predestination.

Predisposition says, “Yes, left unaddressed, with all likelihood we will develop and live in certain ways. Predestination says, we have no choice in the matter, this is the way it will be, no matter what we may want or choose to do about it.

Each and every one of us has characteristic flaws and if we think otherwise, this also reveals a flaw. Only Jesus Himself, was a perfect human being.

The infirmities that are within us are usually just below our surface. In a good majority of individuals they stay buried deep within us until triggered by life events. One very successful woman came to my office one day and shared how she hated the holidays. She said, “When my father comes to my house I feel like a little girl again, listening to his continual remarks of disdain and

negativity. I'm always afraid I will say or do something to set him off. And then I say to myself, 'why should I be afraid of anyone when in my own home?' but then, he has always had that effect on me."

Infirmities can be arrested and kept in check, but rarely can they be totally removed. Because so many feel hopeless when these situations arise, they simply try to avoid them, like skipping family reunions to keep from facing that one protagonist.

There are six simple to say, but not so simple "to do" steps to arrest such prevailing thoughts and emotions.

1. Face your problem squarely
2. Accept your responsibility in the matter.
3. Ask yourself if you want to be healed.
4. Forgive everyone who is involved in your problem.
5. Forgive yourself.
6. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you, *the real* problem.

All healing is from God and God has a healing for each and every individual on the face of this earth. We may not necessarily be a part of raising the dead or healing the blind, but we will be the significant key player in healing our life for both now and eternity.