

# A Little Talk on Healing

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## Scripture:

John 9

In my own spiritual tradition of the Brethren, we often engaged in a prayer and anointing service for the sick and dying. Usually a few prayers, reading of scripture and an anointing with oil in biblical tradition. In the latest years, it has been used more frequently for occasions of illness, surgery or even critical life events.

**Several years ago I was invited to participate in an anointing service for Harold.** Harold and his wife Orphea lived just a few blocks from here, raised in the Brethren faith and tradition, but attending what is now Peek Community Church. They lived just a few houses away and liked the pastor. But when Harold was facing heart surgery in his late 70's, he asked for a Brethren anointing.

There is a point in the service when the patient is asked if there is anything they want to say: any confession, any important wish, anything specific for which to pray. Harold thought for a few minutes and then said: *"I don't have any regrets or any confessions really. My only prayer is that through this process I will be closer to Jesus."*

This was Sunday evening. Surgery was set for early Monday morning. All preparations had been made. The doctor was highly optimistic that the procedure would be successful and Harold would be restored to good health again. I received a phone call about 6am. Harold had died in the night. My wife was quite good friends with Orphea, so we stopped in to pay a visit Monday afternoon. We sat in her living room, reviewing the events, talking of Harold's life and accomplishments.

I was quite surprised at the level of peace in Orphea's spirit. Yes, she was in some shock and grieving, but deep down was at great peace. And then came this: *"You know, John, something is almost funny about this. Harold always said he would never have heart surgery."* And she chuckled a little. And we both remembered Harold's prayer. He couldn't get any closer to Jesus than he was come Monday morning. The healing Harold needed was complete.

**Sometimes the greatest healing events of our lives are in contradiction to our personal desires and our conventional definitions.** We have been conditioned to understand healing as a restoration from a state of illness or pain to a previously enjoyed state of health or happiness. But if we study the activity and teachings of Jesus, often referenced as the Great Physician, we find a new definition. The story in John 9 is about a man who had been blind from birth. The healing even of sight was a brand new experience. He

had never seen the likes of that before. As I read that story, I wondered how many of us have been blind since birth about a lot of things. And what a change could mean if that sight could be opened?

In our service two weeks ago, Lynette led us in a contemplative reading of another healing event: the paralytic at the pool. A man sitting there for 40 years, living in the excuse of his own misery, to put it bluntly. And I wondered how long I have sat on my own duff, paralyzed by my own excuses. As it turned out, the man didn't need the troubled water of the pool to heal anything. Jesus simply asked him if he wanted to be well. And told him to pick up his dang mat. There was no restoration discussed. There was no review of a previously enjoyed condition. For that paralyzed soul, all things became new.

An old man went to the doctor due to a pain in his left leg. After the exam, the doctor said, well I don't find anything really wrong. It is simply old age. The man thought and replied: *"Can't be. You are wrong this time. The doctor said, how can you know I am wrong? Well, my other leg is fine and it is exactly the same age."*

**Our faith does not teach that we will live without challenge, without pain, without tragedy, without limitation.** It teaches, rather, that in all matters of living, the spirit of creation and love is available to us. That force can sometimes restore, it can give us energy to cope, it can even make all things new. And in those times when we become confused and depressed by it all, the redemptive love of our faith can give us hope.

On November 12, 1934, a young female runaway from Kentucky gave birth to a baby boy. Having herself faced untold challenges, she could not even give a name for the boy. His birth record recorded his first name as "No Name." When he was just a few months old, that mother traded her son for a pitcher of beer while drinking in a local bar. His uncle found him and returned him to his mother shortly after. As matters deteriorated, he was placed in a series of reform schools, detention centers, and rehabilitation programs even as well-known as Father Flannigan's Boys Town. Well you can imagine it became a long story. Charles Manson is now 82, having spent most of his life in prison. To this day, his birth certificate reads, No Name Maddox, son of Kathleen Maddox.

When Charles was 13 years old, he returned to the care of his mother when she was released from some time in prison. Upon their meeting, she embraced him. Manson would tell in later interviews that the day of that embrace held the only happy moment of his entire childhood. The only one!

**Over the years, Charles Manson has been evaluated and treated by the best of psychiatric and clinical services. Yet to this day, there has been no restoration, no cure, no healing.** Though I am trained in and supportive of clinical help and change, I also believe that ultimate healing is a spiritual event. How could one talk of restoration of Manson to sanity? There is no sanity to restore.

**In every event of intervention by Jesus, healing was a matter of new life.** We must be born again. In Christ all things are new! The tragedy of a Charles Manson life is one of darkness, never graced by the light of love, forgiveness and healing. It appears his years have been spent coping with darkness in the best way possible. It appears he may have only had 20 seconds of light, radiated on one day, when he was 13 years old.

Manson does not lack insight here. He once shared this quotation: *“From the world of darkness I did loose demons and devils in the power of scorpions to torment.”* As perhaps with most criminal behavior, the tormented soul becomes the tormentor. In the language of his day, Jesus spoke often on the subject of torment and demons. And his prescription was light, love and grace.

I know for sure that every one of us has prayed for healing at some time; and no doubt have prayed for the healing of another. But so often our prayers are about the equivalent of the prayer of a five year old girl: Dear God, I need you to make my mom not allergic to cats. I really want a cat and I really don't want to ask my mom to move out.

### **Mark 7:31-37 Contemporary English Version (CEV)**

<sup>31</sup> Jesus left the region around Tyre and went by way of Sidon toward Lake Galilee. He went through the land near the ten cities known as Decapolis. <sup>[a]</sup>

<sup>32</sup> Some people brought to him a man who was deaf and could hardly talk. They begged Jesus just to touch him.

<sup>33</sup> After Jesus had taken him aside from the crowd, he stuck his fingers in the man's ears. Then he spit and put it on the man's tongue. <sup>34</sup> Jesus looked up toward heaven, and with a groan he said, “Effatha!” <sup>[b]</sup> which means “Open up!”

<sup>35</sup> At once the man could hear, and he had no more trouble talking clearly.

<sup>36</sup> Jesus told the people not to say anything about what he had done. But the more he told them, the more they talked about it. <sup>37</sup> They were completely amazed and said, “Everything he does is good! He even heals people who cannot hear or talk.”

Again, in this story, there was no discussion of restoration to a previous condition. For whatever reasons, this man could not hear or speak correctly. And Jesus took him away from the crowd to a private place. Maybe your healing is a private matter -- between you and the creative force and spirit that put you here. This man's healing was an event of openness.

**The very Aramaic word Jesus spoke was translated: “Be opened.”** I suggest to you that the biblical view of healing is always new life. A new condition. A new experience. New insight. A new kingdom, where the blind see, the lame walk, and the deaf hear. And we are all there!

*(It's the week before finals, and my sister and I are both feeling the stress. We end up driving out to the nearest coffee chain with an armload of homework. I've only been there twice, but my sister frequently refers to it as probably the nicest branch of this coffee chain ever, by which she always means the people there. We order our drinks and sit down on a little couch in the corner. We end up waiting for a really long time, and people who have ordered after us are getting their drinks before us. My sister looks up from her computer.)*

**Sister:** "This is very unusual for them."

*(About 20 minutes later, the woman who took our orders hurries over with our drinks and gift cards, apologizing profusely. Evidently, the ticket had gotten lost or something like that.)*

**Cashier:** "I am so sorry about this! Just take these to any [Coffee Chain], and you'll get a drink for free."

**Me:** "Oh, it's all right; we weren't waiting THAT long!"

*(My sister and I try to reassure her that we're not upset. She starts to walk away, then stops. She looks at my sister and I quizzically.)*

**Cashier:** "Sorry, but... are you two twins?"

**Sister:** "Yes, we are!"

**Cashier:** "My husband is a twin. Was a twin. His sister died really recently and..." *\*she stops for a moment to compose herself\** "And yesterday was the first time he's had to celebrate his birthday without her."

*(My sister and I both express our sympathy and condolences, and she kind of laughs.)*

**Cashier:** "I don't even know why I'm telling you this."

**Me:** "Maybe that's why the drinks were delayed; because you needed someone to talk to."

*(Maybe it was an odd statement, but I really felt that if the drinks were on time, she wouldn't have been able to talk to us about being a twin and losing a twin.)*

**I question the lessons to be learned from my own experience.** Over a two year period I was a foster parent to twelve high-risk teen boys. One year after he left my home, proud of his growth, in love with a beautiful girl, eager to move to new experiences – Steve was shot and killed in a drive-by shooting in the little town of LaPorte. I struggle to understand meaning and faith in such tragedies.

A few years later, Jason was living in South Dakota, happy and healthy and full of love, determination and hard work. He dove into a swimming pool with only two feet of water. He will most likely live the rest of his life as a quadriplegic mobilized by a wheelchair. And today, Jason is living in Boulder, stronger than before, involved in helping his friends live a better life.

**Jesus calls us, through all events, to live the light.** To make the kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven. To live as if the Kingdom was here. Jesus acted out the physical miracles as witness to new life. The stories become for us a metaphor of wholeness. A metaphor of wellness. An invitation to live in a world where blind see, deaf hear, and lame walk. Do you want to be well?

In the story from John 9, the fascinating conclusion occurs when Jesus returns to the blind man with this exchange:

<sup>5</sup> When Jesus heard what had happened, he went and found the man. Then Jesus asked, “Do you have faith in the Son of Man?”

<sup>36</sup> He replied, “Sir, if you will tell me who he is, I will put my faith in him.”

<sup>37</sup> “You have already seen him,” Jesus answered, “and right now he is talking with you.”

<sup>38</sup> The man said, “Lord, I put my faith in you!” Then he worshiped Jesus.

<sup>39</sup> Jesus told him, “I came to judge the people of this world. I am here to give sight to the blind and to make blind everyone who can see.”

There is nothing here to suggest that the physical healing did not occur. But that wasn't the main point. Jesus tells rather pointedly: *“I am here to give sight to the blind and to make blind everyone who thinks they can see.”*

**Our conventional wisdom about healing is turned inside out. Our deepest need is to be opened.** I can easily be a Pharisee myself, debating the method and merits of the physical event and yet missing the point. It is easy to slobber in sympathy over the other guy who needs healing, and thus be blind to my own need for grace and wholeness.

And my faith dictates that the power of healing is in the hands of the creative force of the love and energy which placed me here. Yes, I will pray.

**But the healing will not be in my control.** Our doctor friends will tell us, they do not heal. They work to create the conditions which they trust will facilitate and empower the healing process. It is no different on our spiritual journey. Let us live it out illuminated by the love which brought us here and holds us together.

— Amen