

Mark 7:24–37 24 Then Jesus left Galilee and went north to the region of Tyre. He didn't want anyone to know which house he was staying in, but he couldn't keep it a secret. 25 Right away a woman who had heard about him came and fell at his feet. Her little girl was possessed by an evil spirit, 26 and she begged him to cast out the demon from her daughter. Since she was a Gentile, born in Syrian Phoenicia, 27 Jesus told her, "First I should feed the children—my own family, the Jews. It isn't right to take food from the children and throw it to the dogs." 28 She replied, "That's true, Lord, but even the dogs under the table are allowed to eat the scraps from the children's plates." 29 "Good answer!" he said. "Now go home, for the demon has left your daughter." 30 And when she arrived home, she found her little girl lying quietly in bed, and the demon was gone. 31 Jesus left Tyre and went up to Sidon before going back to the Sea of Galilee and the region of the Ten Towns. 32 A deaf man with a speech impediment was brought to him, and the people begged Jesus to lay his hands on the man to heal him. 33 Jesus led him away from the crowd so they could be alone. He put his fingers into the man's ears. Then, spitting on his own fingers, he touched the man's tongue. 34 Looking up to heaven, he sighed and said, "Ephphatha," which means, "Be opened!" 35 Instantly the man could hear perfectly, and his tongue was freed so he could speak plainly! 36 Jesus told the crowd not to tell anyone, but the more he told them not to, the more they spread the news. 37 They were completely amazed and said again and again, "Everything he does is wonderful. He even makes the deaf to hear and gives speech to those who cannot speak."

If you look at today's Psalm, check out the verbs of what God does:

Ps.146: ⁶He made heaven and earth, the sea, and everything in them. He keeps every promise forever. ⁷He gives justice to the oppressed and food to the hungry. The LORD frees the prisoners. ⁸The LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The LORD lifts up those who are weighed down. The LORD loves the godly. ⁹The LORD protects the foreigners among us. He cares for the orphans and widows, but he frustrates the plans of the wicked.

Let's look at v.8 The LORD opens the eyes of the blind. The second half of today's Gospel shows Jesus healing a blind man's eyes. Our first lesson from Is.35 says: "Be strong, and do not fear, for your God is coming to destroy your enemies. He is coming to save you." ⁵ And when he comes, he will open the eyes of the blind and unplug the ears of the deaf. Healing. There are several hymns, some in our hymnal, that speak to God's involvement in healing. *Healer of our Every Ill* is one of them on 738. Think about the words. The chorus follows each verse. Healer

of our every ill, Light of each tomorrow, give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.

1. You who know our fears and sadness, grace us with your peace and gladness. Spirit of all comfort, fill our hearts.

2. In the pain and joy beholding, how your grace is still unfolding, give us all your vision, God of love.

3. Give us strength to love each other, every sister, every brother. Spirit of all kindness, be our guide.

4. You who know each thought and feeling, teach us all your way of healing. Spirit of compassion, fill each heart.

Another song reflects Exodus 15. The chorus goes: Chorus: "I am the God that healeth thee. I am the Lord, Your healer. I speak My word and heal your disease. I am the Lord Your healer."

Half of my 50 years in ministry has been in various health care settings: cancer hospital, hospice, but mostly in an acute care hospital. One of my spiritual gifts is intercession. When I visit, I don't force prayer on people but ask if they would like me to have prayer with them now or remember them later. It gives them the freedom to choose. If they say "Now" or "both," I will then ask do you want to start or do you want me to go ahead? I say that because if they do choose to start, they know their situation better than I. One of our hospital staff member's wife lost her baby full term. She had had a C section and couldn't go to the funeral. I went with her husband and on returning offered prayer. She said she would start and she prayed a prayer from a mother's grieving heart that I couldn't begin to express, then I finished the prayer. Another time, I was at an introductory meeting for the release of the New King James Bible and didn't have my hospital beeper turned on. When I returned to the hospital, a staff member said that I was being paged stat to the Emergency Room. I went and about 10 staff were lined up across the hall next to a treatment room with the door closed. The nurse manager said that a little girl had died of leukemia and the parents and their pastor were in the room trying to raise her from the dead. In the tenseness, I asked the nurse, who was a believer, was anything they were doing illegal, immoral or fattening? She smiled and said "No." I went into the room, I knew the parents, pastor and the child from past visits in the hospital. I didn't say anything but put my hands on the shoulders of the mom and dad to agree in prayer with their pastor. He finally said, "Lord, if you will not heal this little girl and bring her back, then begin to heal the hearts of her mom and dad." The parents left quietly grieving, feeling like they did everything they could. Some parents when they lose a child in the hospital would ride in the hearse with the body to

the funeral home. Not these parents. They accepted God's calling their little girl home. I've prayed many times with people for healing. Many times, it wasn't to be. My prayer partner, Willie Sosa in San Angelo has the gift of healing. When he is called to someone's home for a sick person, he will ask the gathered family if they are Christians. If all are not, he will say that he cannot begin a healing prayer unless everyone is a Christian. He then prays the sinner's prayer to help everyone come to faith, then carries out a healing prayer. Many times, people are healed. Jesus in our text heals the Gentile woman's child at a distance responding to her mother's faith. After this, Mark's Gospel records that He went to Sidon and healed a deaf man.

Meredith Andrew's song, *Not for a Moment*, ends with these words: "After all You are constant. After all You are only good. After all You are sovereign. Not for a moment will You forsake me. Not for a moment will You forsake me. And every step every breath you are there. Every tear every cry every prayer. In my hurt at my worst, when my world falls down, not for a moment will You forsake me even in the dark, even when it's hard, You will never leave me." In another song, called *Closer to You*, some words say to the Lord: **YOU'RE MY CONSTANT IN THE CHANGE.**

YOU ARE THE COLOR THAT NEVER FADES. EVERY SEASON I GO THROUGH IS BRINGING ME CLOSER TO YOU. TILL EVERYTHING FALLS INTO PLACE, WHEN WE'RE STANDING FACE TO FACE. EVERY HEALING AND HEARTBREAK BRINGS ME CLOSER.

A group from Canada called Love and the Outcome has a song called *He is With Us* and some of the words speak to healing: "Remember when your hope is lost and faith is shaken. Remember when you wonder if you're gonna make it. There's a hand stretched out through your deepest doubt. We can't pretend to see the ending or what's coming up ahead to know the story of tomorrow but we can stay close to the One who knows. (And the chorus goes)

We can trust our God He knows what He's doing; Though it might hurt now, We won't be ruined. It might seem there's an ocean in between. But He's holding on to you and me and He's never gonna leave, no He is with us, He is with us Always, ...

We believe there is purpose, there is meaning in everything. We surrender to His leading. He wants nothing more than to have us close."

Robin Mark has a song called, *Be Unto Your Name*. Some of its words help us to look at healing. He sings: "We are a moment, You are forever, Lord of the Ages, God before time. We are a vapor, You are eternal, Love everlasting, reigning on high. (And then the chorus) Holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, Worthy is the lamb who was slain. Highest praises, honor and glory be unto Your name, be unto Your name. (And the second verse) We are the broken; You are the

healer, Jesus, Redeemer, mighty to save. You are the love Song we'll sing forever, bowing before You, blessing Your name.”

What I like about this song is that it puts things into perspective. V.2 of today's Psalm says: *I will praise the LORD as long as I live. I will sing praises to my God with my dying breath.*

When it comes to prayer for healing, what the scriptures tell us is never stop, be persistent, as in the parable of the widow and unjust judge. (Luke 18) Holy Ghost Church has a prayer chain and my wife and I are on it. My prayer list twice daily includes over thirty people. I try to find out how they are doing so that my prayer is appropriate. It is also valuable to stay up on the news from several good sources so that you can pray for people facing great difficulty such as in Afghanistan, in Haiti post- earthquake, or New Orleans post Hurricane Ida. Healing tends to focus on physical bodies but also needs to include hearts and spirits. To pray for an openness to God, using what I mentioned in the past as the *Drive By Prayer*, from John 6 verses, is vitally important. That is an area of healing that is often overlooked.

Finally, healing involves practical care such as seeing a doctor, bandaging a wound, comforting a frightened child before a medical procedure, pulling a thorn from your hand or dog's paw.

Jesus is our source of healing as our Gospel text says loud and clear. God cares about His people as the first lesson and Psalm address. Some have the gift of healing and may enter a medical profession to express that gift or they may have a spiritual healing gift. After all, when Jesus sent the 70 out two by two, He told them to preach the good news, heal the sick and deliver them from demonic oppression. If we have been so gifted, it is our responsibility to do what we can. In the end, it is about loving God first and our neighbor as ourselves.

If you use Portals of Prayer as a daily devotional, last Monday addressed the challenges we face in a general way. It said in part: We have to live with the reality that our life will be impacted by the inevitable headaches and heartaches that we encounter in this world. However, by God's grace and power we can be strong and courageous no matter what challenges we may face. God's true and trustworthy Word assures us, “Do not be frightened and do not be dismayed for the Lord, your God, is with you wherever you go.” (Joshua 1:9) By faith in the risen Christ, we are able to see beyond the troubles and struggles of this life. St. Paul wrote the Romans (ch.8), “The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us” in heaven.”

May God grant you whatever healings you need in your life and grant you His peace. Amen