

Service of the Word for Healing-C

October 21, 2007

Isaiah 35: 5-8; 2 Tim. 4: 5-11; Luke 1:1-4; 24: 44-55

Title: Longed For

Let us pray:

Your servant Isaiah envisioned a highway with healing. Your apostle, Paul, Named those who carried out your healing. Your son, Jesus, our Lord, gave the church the spirit to heal. Stiffen our resolve to witness to your healing love. Amen.

Recently I was leaving a voicemail for a colleague at another church. here's what his recorded message said: "Hell-o, this is Pastor \_\_\_\_\_, Merry Christmas and Happy New Year to you".... and went on give instruction as to how to reach him.

When it came time to leave a message, I was dumbstruck. What do I say? "Hey, I thought it was October." Or "Help me learn to plan ahead the way you do." Or "The local merchants would be proud of you." I proceeded to say something like this "Regardless of what day it is where you are, I'm still hoping we can have lunch today. Merry Christmas."

God sends, God issues a message we don't expect. Much like that out of season voicemail, God renames the seasons of life. The whole sweep and thrust of the Gospel is to bring life. When the Gospel is uttered, the impact is dramatic.

Jesus to the disciples as he ascends— It's your job to communicate, tell,  
Proclaim repentance and forgiveness to all. Make your witness.

Paul to Timothy—carry out the ministry—spread good news,  
Be alert to life.

Isaiah to the hopeless—God's new day is coming and He will  
put you are on the  
Road to joy.

The resolve of God is that life begins a new. God does what the world thinks impossible. Brings life from death, freedom from bondage,

Healing amidst illness, restoration. The whole of Luke's gospel-- an orderly account of this disorderly God of new life, Jesus.

The church's great privilege is to embody the joy of Jesus.  
To live in this world being held by his love, being wrapped up  
In his peace, being gathered in thanksgiving and song amidst  
Decay and despair.

The real test of our living our faith is not  
That we placidly avoid the full range of life's issues, but that  
Amidst the chaos ---the over scheduling, the  
Unexpected, uninvited, the call to be anxious and afraid—amidst  
All that, we are schooled by Jesus' spirit of healing/hope.

A group here recently saw and discussed the film *Away From Her*, about a woman debilitated by Alzheimer's disease. She ends up living in a care facility not knowing her husband. In fact, bonding with another man. Her husband struggles to know his place, to connect with her.

I was struck by one small incident in the drama. It's the only time a church is mentioned. While in conversation a nurse shares with this despondent husband the content of a sign outside a church. Evidently this church has a message board.

Here's that faith community's message:  
No matter what you have been, there is a better day ahead for you.

Those dealing with Alzheimers may disagree.  
The advance of that illness brings a retreat from life.  
Our better days are behind us, they might say.

What is our witness? No better days?  
Under the power of Christ, better days.  
Martin Luther reflecting on the meaning of our days in his Small Catechism  
Crisply names our days:

Our sinful self is drowned through daily repentance  
And day after day a new self arises to live with God in  
In righteousness.

No matter what your have been,  
There is by the promise of Christ, a better day ahead.

Even this movie quietly testified to that better day  
As his final act of love the husband brings his wife's boyfriend  
To her to enjoy a visit. He witnesses to healing by  
Pushing an old man in a wheel chair.

For several weeks we have left these potted plants beside our main entrance.  
A reminder of the draught, a symbol of decay, what happens when life is  
parched. What if we put these dead trees out by Creedmoor and Sawmill  
with the sign:

The Gospel of Jesus declares:  
No matter what you have been, there is a better day ahead  
For you.

There is a healing alternative to this (point to the tree) declares Isaiah.  
Disabled humans given back their lives. Blind no more; deaf no more;  
Lame no more. Restored. What prevents living effectively and fully  
No more. Life begins again by the resolve of God.

Less than 100 days of water in Wake County. A massive draught. Every  
plant, tree, grass thirsty, parched, without refreshment.  
God is coming; rain is promised—streams in the desert, pools of refreshment  
in the sand, grass a savannah.

Isaiah envisions all of creation in a great processional of life,  
A highway where all those made lame, including the parched earth  
Joins in the march of thanksgiving.  
God does what the world thinks not possible.

Our eucharistic prayers remind us that the highway of  
Life is among us. Today, at the altar when Pastor Jennifer  
Names the central reality of Jesus gift of life. Among the  
Words she will utter listen to the verbs:

“When the world was a formless void, you formed order and beauty.  
When Abraham and Sarah were barren, you sent them a child. When  
The Isrealites were enslaved, you led them to freedom. Ruth faced  
Starvation, David fought Golaith, and psalmists cried out for healing,  
And full of compassion, you granted the people your life.”

To participate in a service of the word for healing is to believe we are on that same road, sharing in the march to new life. We may not get the cure we are after, but we are given the companion for the journey...the spirit of power and life.

To participate in a service of the word for healing

Is to receive the very message delivered to Timothy:  
Amidst any suffering you have the great privilege of  
Sharing good news

To participate in the service of the word for healing is  
To be given through the hands of another the very confident  
Blessing that Jesus is pulling for you, Jesus is blessing you,  
Jesus is calling you to bear in your bones his gracious gospel  
Of life, the very same blessing he gave to the first disciples

There is so much that can prevent us from living a full life, the life God in Christ intended. We can be bent down by grief, timidity, past failures,  
A physical wound, a broken heart, expectations left unfulfilled...  
We can live crippled, impaired, without the mark of Christ.

We can even be like Demas, finding ourselves falling away from our faith, finding life in other places.

No matter what you have been, there is a better day ahead for you.  
What a witness just by holding a service of the word for healing. Here we  
Enter into the resolve of God in Christ Jesus.

Merry Christmas.