

Homily for a Service of Healing

June 2, 2009

Delivered by the Rev. Margaret Bullitt-Jonas

Grace Church, Amherst, MA

2 Kings 20: 1-5

Psalm 13

2 Corinthians 1:3-5

Luke 17: 11-19

All for you

*“I put my trust in your mercy; my heart is joyful because of your saving help.” --
Psalm 13:5*

This is one of those services when every person made a free and deliberate decision to be here. We didn't come to church tonight because it is Sunday morning and we always show up on Sunday morning. We did not come out of habit or obligation. You and I chose to be here. We wanted to be here. Maybe we even *needed* to be here. Something impelled each of us to step out of our daily routine and come to church and take part in this special service of healing. What brought you here tonight? What led you to come? Was it concern for a friend or loved one who needs physical healing -- perhaps healing from a blood clot or a cancerous tumor, or from the ravages of Alzheimer's? Is it for someone's physical healing that you most yearn tonight -- for healing from illness or accident, or from any of the countless ailments and infirmities that can afflict our beloved body and the bodies of those we love?

Or maybe it is emotional healing that you most seek tonight -- maybe healing for a marriage that has grown stormy or cold, or resolution of a difficulty between friend and friend, or parent and child, or neighbor and neighbor. Is there a relationship in your life in which communication has broken down, or mistrust has built up, or words have been spoken and deeds have been done that you now regret? Is there a relationship in your life that needs healing?

Or maybe it is spiritual healing that you seek -- for someone to be released from anxiety, or for someone to be set free from bouts of confusion or periods of depression or shame. So many people go through each day carrying a heavy weight of remorse or self-attack, consumed by bitterness or envy, or by a vague, generalized feeling of unease and dissatisfaction. So many people feel trapped by loneliness, or feel isolated and afraid. Is it a search for spiritual healing that brings you here tonight?

I invite you to take a moment to touch into what drew you here this evening. What is the healing that you most seek from God? I invite you to let yourself feel

that desire for healing as clearly and in as focused a way as you can. Whatever brought you here -- you are in the right place. Healing is what God loves to do. Healing would be God's middle name, if God had a middle name. Healing is what God is always up to, for as we heard in the second reading, God is "the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation" [2 Corinthians 1:3]. Our very longing for healing is a sign that God is already alive within us, animating and propelling our search for reconciliation and wholeness and fullness of life.

You may think that you came here tonight so that someone else could be healed -- because you want to lend your prayerful energy to the healing of your brother in Christ, or your sister in Christ, or because you want to pray for healing in the larger world, which God knows needs plenty of healing. That is all well and good, and those are wonderful reasons to be here. But I want to tell you something. This service is for you. This service is not just for your brother in Christ, or for your sister in Christ, or for the world at large, or for anyone else. This service is for you. It is for *your* healing that we are singing these hymns and praying these prayers. It is for *your* healing first of all that God sent you into this room tonight, whether you knew it or not. It is *your* body that God wants to touch with a healing touch, *your* mind that God wants to soothe and bless, *your* heart that God wants to fill with God's peace. Maybe you came here tonight thinking that it was your brother or sister who needed to be transformed, but the truth is that you are here tonight for *your own* transformation.

Many of us can get codependent when it comes to healing. I'm fine, I may say to myself -- *she* is the one who is in need; *he* is the one who could use some prayers. *My* suffering isn't very important compared to *hers*. *My* guilt or sorrow or shame doesn't really matter in the big scheme of things -- surely God has something more important to do than to waste time with the likes of me. Can you hear the way that an inner voice like that can minimize our pain and make us gloss it over and pretend it isn't there? Can you hear how thoughts like that actually function to push God away? It is only when we truly acknowledge our own need, only when we honestly admit to ourselves and to God how deeply we need God, how much we long for and depend on God's healing and strengthening presence in our own lives, that the Spirit of God in Christ can come to us with power, and heal what needs to be healed. It is only when we can acknowledge our own wounds -- our sin and losses, weakness and grief -- that God can touch us in our depths and allow healing to spring up within our souls.

So this service is a place to be ruthlessly honest. I need healing. You need healing. Each of us stands in need of God. Admitting that fact can be a great relief, for church should be one place in the world where we don't have to look good; we

don't have to pretend to be self-sufficient and totally in control; we don't have to make believe that we have magically transcended the human condition and are somehow invulnerable and immortal. Church is a place to face ourselves as we really are, and freely admitting our need to be healed is the first and necessary step in allowing God to heal us.

That's not all. Confessing our need to be healed also opens us to connect with each other in an authentic way and to build a genuine community. This is where we meet, you and I: in this sacred space in which each of us acknowledges our own sinfulness and failures, our own suffering and imperfections. In this place of mutual vulnerability, we can help each other to tell the truth, and turn to the light, and take our place in a life-changing community that opens itself again and again and again to the cleansing, purifying, bracing, consoling, and strengthening love of God.

God's healing may not take the form that you or I expect. The way in which God's healing will come is not something that we can guide or control or predict. But we can trust with all our heart in God's embracing love, and in whatever way our healing comes, and even *before* it comes, we can pray to God with the psalmist, "I put my trust in your mercy; my heart is joyful because of your saving help." So come to the altar rail, everyone who needs healing. And then come to the table, all you who long to hear God say what God said to Hezekiah, "I have heard your prayer, I have seen your tears; indeed, I will heal you" [2 Kings 20:5].