

The Nineteenth Sunday after Pentecost
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Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 43:8-13; Psalm 124; Luke 4:14-21

Cured or Healed: There is a Difference. Recovery of sight, restoration of hearing, what wonderful cures for anyone who can't see or can't hear. I don't know about you, but for me the first thing that comes to mind when I think of a healing service is that it is a service where people are cured from some sort of handicap or some sort of illness. Such a prospect is pretty wonderful, don't you think?

Both the old testament reading and the gospel this morning speak of just such healing. Little wonder then, that we would seek just such a wonder for ourselves and for those we love when they are in need. It was true for me when I was diagnosed with cancer back in 1974. The doctors had told me I could expect to live about 18 months. My family and friends at home prayed for my healing. The funny thing is, I don't remember praying for my own healing at all. I accepted what the doctors told me. So what I did pray for? You are not going to believe it. It was the ability to complete my Ph.D. which I was studying right at the time.

Thanks to the skills of surgeons, and to the radiation which they used, I was cured. And, I was very thankful. In fact the whole episode led me back to a full participation in church life after having abandoned it, thinking it was rather shallow and meaningless. Then disaster struck.

Four years later my brother was diagnosed with cancer and he also was given about 18 months to live. Now that time I did pray. I prayed fervently for his healing as did our family and his friends. He went to faith healers, he went to healing services, but eventually he died, within the 18 months they had given him after his initial diagnosis. Believe me, that was a devastating, terrible experience. I could not believe that God would let me be cured, and let my brother die. There was no reason for him dying and my living. It seemed to me that our prayers didn't count for zip! They meant absolutely nothing.

Yet, if you look at gospel and the Old Testament lesson this morning you will see that disaster was not at all uncommon for the people of God in the dark times of the past. The people addressed by Isaiah were in captivity in Babylon. Hard for us to believe what that is like to be carried off to a foreign county. To live there after having lost everything. The people in Jesus time were suffering under the heel of the Roman government and their puppet monarch. It was also disastrous for Jesus, and would eventually lead, or at least be part of which led, to Jesus dying.

The religious leaders were upset with Jesus, particularly in regard to His healing people. People who were blind, people who were deaf, people who were lame, which everyone believed was the result of evil powers and their own sinfulness. Only God, they thought, could forgive these sins. They were perplexed and they were angered by Jesus, acting as God. There was only one alternative that they could see. Jesus had to be in league with the evil powers. Those powers associated with the wickedness and evil and which caused illness in the first place.

It is precisely to these issues that the prophet and Jesus speak. The prophet proclaims the recovery of sight and hearing, so that the people might once again become God's faithful people now that they had new vision and a new ability to hear God leading them. Jesus offered to cure the blind and the deaf as well, but it is important for us to understand that Jesus didn't heal every person in the Holy land who was deaf or blind. For Jesus is pointing to a far deeper healing of vision and hearing and being. He is talking about restoring a people whose brokenness is mended by the power of God working through Him, just as the Prophet Isaiah was speaking to God's healing and mending of the brokenness of the people of God who were in captivity in Babylon and who would eventually be brought back to Jerusalem.

Then Jesus reminds us that very making whole, that very repairing of brokenness, that very healing, happens right before us. Just as it happened then, it will happen before us today. For Jesus proclaims and brings into being a new age where people once blind to God's presence, once deaf to God's word, are now able to discern God's presence and live and act as His disciples. So it is that we are equipped to lead a deeper devotional life as we set aside daily time to read scripture and pray and we are enabled to discern God's leading and will as we live for Him in the world.

The healing we are offered today is so much broader, than just curing, so much deeper than just curing of human illness and handicaps. It is the restoration of our human wholeness which gives us our ability to live in the world even though we are faced with the struggle of all sorts of physical illness and ailments.

And there lay for me the solution to my anger, pain and guilt that I survived and my brother died. For when I realized the deeper meaning of the healing proclaimed by Isaiah and Jesus I understood. While I had been cured, my brother had been healed.

Amen.