

## *Healed Indeed*

Time after Pentecost – Lectionary 29  
The Reverend J. Stewart Hardy, Ph.D.

Sunday, October 18, 2009  
Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church

Isaiah 35:5-8; Psalm 124; Luke 7:18-23

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God the Father and our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

George had been away from home for over two weeks. When he got back he couldn't wait to see his neighbour Gary. You see, George had travelled with his dog to a Christian dog obedience school and was eager to demonstrate the wonderful progress his dog had made. He called Gary over and told him all about the training and then set his dog to demonstrate all that it had learned.

First George threw a stick, but told his dog to stay. The dog watched the stick but remained frozen at George's side. Then George cried "fetch," and the dog was off like a bullet and back with the stick in the twinkling of an eye. The dog sat, rolled over, laid down on command without hesitation, but Gary was only mildly impressed. And then George ordered the dog to heal. It ran over to Gary, raised itself on its hind legs and put both its forepaws on Gary's forehead.

When we get the joke we laugh. And we laugh because the story plays off the worst of the faith healers that tout their abilities and their wares on television. I must admit to you, as well, my own rejection of the notion of such healing.

My brother and I were both diagnosed with cancer. We were both given 18 months to live. We both received the appropriate medical treatments that were available at the time, and in my brother's case, moving beyond the limitations of the available medical care, faith healers were called in. I survived. My brother died.

It took me a long time to get over my despair that I had survived and my brother did not, especially given the fact that the faith healers failed. It took me ages to understand that while my brother had not been cured, amazingly enough, he had actually been healed. What am I saying? Not cured but healed? Even so, when medical healing runs up against the limits of available knowledge we still carry, don't we, deep in our hearts, a deep longing for a miracle.

It wasn't until seminary that I began to understand that, in fact, Jesus primary mission had very little to do with curing the sick. Some who were ill and suffering were fortunate indeed. Parents interceded, friends pleaded, and the sick presented themselves, and Jesus turned noone away. But there were many, many more who suffered that never met him. In fact, whenever he did heal someone he set off a discussion about the origin of his power to cure.

It was widely believed in those times, that people brought illness and handicap upon themselves as a result of their own personal wickedness and sinfulness. Their suffering, it was believed, was their just desserts. To receive a cure meant that they had been forgiven their sins, cleansed of their wickedness and restored to full life in the community. That clearly was the work of God.

And only the work that God could do. But who was this Galilean, this Jesus, that displayed such power? Surely he wasn't God. So did he draw his power from Satan?

When the gospels are read with care, and in their entirety, one soon discovers that while Jesus cured people and performed other miracles, they of themselves were never able to convince people as to who Jesus was and what he was about. For his calling was the reconciliation of God's chosen people, and Gentiles, with God. So God, in and through Jesus, was restoring a right relationship between himself and Jew and Gentile as his forgiven and beloved children. Need I remind you, beloved, that that's exactly who each and every one of us is? And that reconciliation, beloved, is the real healing that Jesus was and is about.

The message first appears in our reading that we heard from the prophet Isaiah. The prophecy is astounding in its sweep.

“Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped.  
Then the lame shall leap like a deer, and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.”

Now that's healing indeed. And the thrust of that prophecy is taken up in this morning's gospel reading. John the Baptist, imprisoned as he was, heard what was going on and heard about the dispute and was curious to know exactly who Jesus was. Sort of a puzzle, isn't it, after he baptized the man.

Unable to go himself, he sent two disciples to check things out for him. They watched, they listened, and they finally carried out their duties by interviewing Jesus, himself. His response to them left no doubt in their mind. “Go and tell John what you've seen and heard. The blind receive their sight. The lame walk. The lepers are cleansed. The deaf hear. The dead are raised. The poor have good news brought to them.”

Like so much in the Bible, this message calls for us to understand it at two levels. First, in his time Jesus did cure the blind, the lame, the lepers, and the deaf. He restored the dead to life and brought good news to the poor. But, there's a much deeper meaning which eventually becomes clear to careful readers, and we sang about it in the first hymn this morning. When you have a moment, re-read the second verse of that hymn. For the blind are not only those who have physically lost their sight, but those who had illusioned, who've been unable to see God at work in Jesus in their very presence. The lame are those who are equipped to walk in Jesus' footsteps, the deaf equipped to hear the good news, the poor spiritually strengthened and offered the continual presence of the Holy Spirit after Jesus' resurrection and ascension. But most importantly of all — most importantly of all — we are all offered this in the forgiveness of sin along with a restored life — today, tomorrow, throughout our time in this world and throughout our time in the next.

So come. Gather here to be served from the table of the Lord. Receive the bread of life and the wine of forgiveness. Then receive the anointing oil with the words following your name. “In the name of our Saviour Jesus Christ, receive this oil as a sign of healing and forgiveness.” I'll tell

you one thing, this sure isn't the forepaws of George's dog, but it's the indelible mark which identifies you forever as Christ's own. And that, beloved, is healing indeed.

Amen.