

When You Need to be Healed, You're a Mission Field

Colleagues

Back in October—six postings ago—a “Mission Festival” sermon was sent your way. It was originally preached where Robin Morgan is pastor in Washington, Missouri, an hour’s drive west of St. Louis. The Sunday thereafter I was asked to “do likewise” in the opposite direction, east across the Mississippi River with two rural congregations in southern Illinois. Since the scripture readings for the day were new, I couldn’t just use the “old” sermon. And these new readings were too juicy to leave untasted. Here’s what bubbled up from those basic ingredients when I did just that. Peace and Joy!

Ed Schroeder

Mission Festival.

October 14, 2007

***St. John’s Lutheran Church, Bremen, IL (9:00 a.m.)
and Peace Lutheran Church, Chester IL (10:30)***

Texts (in shorthand):

- A. 2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15 Naaman the leper and Elisha the healer.*
- B. 2 Timothy 2:8-15 Remember JC raised from the dead = Paul’s gospel. Paul suffers for this Gospel, “toughs it out,” so that the elect obtain salvation [Greek: soteria] in CJ with eternal glory. Here’s a “faithful” [Greek:*

pistos] saying: If we..., then we... (2x affirmative) die/live and endure/reign. If we . . . , then he. . . (2x negative) we deny, then he deny; [BUT] if we faithless/ he faithful [pistos] for he cannot deny himself. Caveat about logomachy. Final exhortation for Timothy to be a “straightshooter” [Greek: orthotomounta, literally a “straight-cutter”] about the word of truth.

C. Luke 17:11-19 Ten lepers cleansed, one healed. Faith saves. [Note three different verbs]

For this Mission Sunday/Mission Festival we’ve got 3 readings about healing. The first and last are lepers getting healed, and St. Paul’s words in the second reading to one of his students speaks of “the soteria (healing) that is in Christ Jesus.”

SERMON THEME:

Part 1: When You Need to be Healed, You’re a Mission Field.

Part 2: When you do get healed, you’re a missionary.

We’ll start with NAAMAN AND ELISHA The secret is in the prophet’s name.

Naaman’s Problem

He’s a big shot. Head honcho of the Syrian Army. What’s his problem? Leprosy? Worse than that. His Syrian gods don’t heal!

Then of all things this Israeli slave girl, never named, who does the housework, says: “We’ve got a prophet in Israel who could do it.” HIS NAME TELLS THE WHOLE STORY. It’s Eli-sha. A full sentence in Hebrew: “My God heals.” No Syrian gods heal.

Naaman’s no dummy. Get to the guy whose God heals!

And it happens in such a low-key way, with no razzle-dazzle, that it almost keeps Naaman from getting healed.

And Naaman becomes a missionary!

“Now I know that there is no God [who heals] in all the earth, except in Israel.”

Imagine what he told everybody when he got back to Syria. When you need to be healed, you’re a mission field. When you get healed, you’re a missionary.

But he’s the second missionary in the story. Who was the first one? Of course, the never-named girl brought back from Israel—doubtless from Naaman’s earlier military exploits—as a slave.

Before we move on we need to take a look at Naaman’s sickness. How sick IS he really? Three levels—outside, inside, God-side.

OUTSIDE leprosy INSIDE “heart-problem” Martin Luther’s definition for a god: what’s he hanging his heart on in his hope to be healed? Stuff. His own stuff. Look at all the stuff he brings along to “pay the doctor.” When the healing comes as a freebee, a freebee OFFER, he almost blows it. Because of what his heart’s hanging on.

GODSIDE No connection with a God who heals. First of all a God who heals the “No-connection with God” sickness.

Which brings us to today’s Gospel

Same sort of story, but with add-ons. Biggest add-on, of course, is Jesus,

What's Jesus's name in the Hebrew dialect they spoke in Jesus' day? Yeshua. Like the word Eli-sha, that's a whole sentence. "God is healing." Doing the healing IN Jesus. That's a jump up from Eli-sha. God in person on the ground doing the healing.

Three verbs are central here in this Luke text.

Cleansed, healed, saved. The way Luke uses these three they are different, not all the same, not synonyms.

Diagnosis and Prognosis. Three steps down, and three steps up.

Need to be healed, mission field, but only one of the 10 became a missionary "When he saw that he was healed, he turned back, praising God with a loud voice." What's that? Missionary!

When you need to be healed, you're a mission field. When you get healed, you're a missionary.

And then to Paul in his counsel to his pastor-student Timothy to get the picture of how this all works. You might be tempted to say that this is addressed only to pastors, folks such as Timothy. But if all faith-in-Jesus folks are healed-ones, and if the healed-ones then become missionaries, then Paul is talking to all of us here this morning, right here in Randolph County, Illinois. Whether we're "officially" preachers or not. Listen.

[WALK & TALK through the Timothy text.] REMEMBER JESUS CHRIST, RAISED FROM THE DEAD THAT IS MY GOSPEL. That is the "soteria," the medicine that heals the God-problem. With the God-problem healed, the heart-problem gets healed. And in two of today's three cases also the outside sicknesses.

And now to us here in Randolph County.

Pastor Reuter is not your paid missionary. When you get healed, you can't hire a substitute to live your healed life. Did you notice who were the missionaries in these Bible stories? Naaman, the servant girl, the guy just healed by Jesus. Never went to a seminary. Never got ordained. They JUST got healed. And that was it. That made them missionaries.

Jesus is no dummy. "As the Father sent me, so I send you." That's what he said to the healed-ones the first time they saw him after Easter. "I send you right back to the daily life places where you live." Who knows better than you what the sicknesses all are—especially the God-sickness—of the folks you live with? Surely not Pastor Reuter. Who knows better than you what they are hanging their hearts on? Who knows how these other Gods really are NOT gods that heal? Who knows better than you?

And even more: Who is THERE on the spot? Right on the scene to be the missionaary? To be the "little girl," the one-in-ten who got healed all the way through? Or even the big-shot Naaman, the CEO, the manager, the boss running the business, the head honcho of this or that?

If you grew up like I did (also an Illinois farm boy), you probably always thought "mission and missionaries" was in some other place in the world. Overseas, but not here in Randolph county.

But today's texts are telling us something else. They are talking about us, all of us here in church this morning: When you need to be healed, you're a mission field. When you do get healed, you're a missionary. Our texts show us that it's the God-problem, the root problem, that needs healing. So the only conclusion is: the whole world is a mission field. Not just the strange people overseas. That's the Bible's mission mantra:

"Mission on all 6 continents." America is a mission field. This southern Illinois part of America is too. Randolph county, a mission field. And you, you all, are the missionaries. Even if you've never thought of it before and never said it before, say it now. "Randolph county is my mission field."

You know I didn't just think this up. It comes from the Word of God. It comes from Jesus: "As the Father sent me, so I send you." The same medicine that heals your God-problem works for everybody's God-problem. And you live with these folks day in and day out. You are not in these relationships, in these situations, just by accident. Christ says he "sent you" there. Right there into these very places with these very people.

It takes courage to be a missionary—not just overseas, but probably even more right here at home. St. Paul's words to Timothy tell us where the courage comes from. He tells Timothy that the "saying was true" for him. It's true for us too:

If we die with Christ, we live with Christ.

If we endure, we reign.

If we get shaky (faithless), he remains faithFULL, For he cannot deny himself.

Remember, his very name is "God is healing." He can't deny that. He can't say he's somebody else. And he won't. That's his promise. When someone gives his life for you, you can surely trust his promise.

Amen.