

The Fourth Sunday after the Epiphany - Year B
February 1, 2009
The Reverend Mary Lee Bergeron

“He Is Good Medicine”

*God of hope before us, God of healing within us, God of mercy above us,
Come be with us. Amen.*

Mark 1:21-28 1 Corinthians 8:1-13 Psalm 11 Deuteronomy 18:15-20

What would it have been like to be in the synagogue and have the scene unfold before our eyes – the scene that we read from the Gospel of Mark? Jesus is teaching; all are astonished at his insights and how he speaks with authority. Suddenly there is noise, loud noise and disruption (the kind we don't like in services). This noise continues and so all look for the cause.

There is a man standing now in front of the Rabbi Jesus. Obviously this man is disturbed. He yells out, “What are you doing here Jesus? What business do you have here with us? Us? He goes on to say “ I know you here to destroy us...Then he says,” You are God's Holy One!” It seems being in the presence of Jesus opens this disturbed man to saying this truth, You are God's Holy One!

Jesus, looks at the man with eyes of love and with the power of authority, says, “Be Silent, get out of him!! The man falls and has spasms, gives a great shout and then is quiet. The unclean spirits or demons have left. The man freed of his affliction gets up; looks calm. All watching are amazed. The fame of Jesus and this healing spreads everywhere.

Think of the stories of the people with physical illnesses who Jesus heals. Recall

his words. Jesus says; to the paralyzed man – ‘get up and walk’; to blind Bartimaeus - ‘Go, your faith has made you well’; to the man with leprosy – ‘be made clean’; to the deaf mute – ‘.Epiphatha’, ‘Be Opened!’. Jesus touches and heals the unclean; shows compassion and embraces the sick.

As you read and study the healings you see that some are physical, others mental and yet all are spiritual healings. We know that people with physical illnesses ask for prayers for healing. Certainly they are also receiving help from the medical community – for medications, surgery, physical therapy and other interventions. We are aware of the serious needs

for healing of mental illness – through psychologist and psychiatrist and medication. Again there is strong need of spiritual guidance through prayer and attending worship; through confession, Scripture and the Eucharist for all illnesses? Our spiritual journey does affect our well being and our protection from evil.

In the 80's a psychologist in a mental hospital for the criminally insane in Hawaii added prayer to his treatment approach. Dr. Hew Len did an experiment over a 2 year period. It was understood that in addition to the regular therapy for the most involved patients who were many times tied in their chairs in locked rooms that he would add visualization and prayer. His premise was that 'we do not see people as they really are – instead we imagine them with what we have read about them and their illness. For example as the doctor reads the chart he or she does have image of the patient and their condition that day.

With this in mind, when Dr. Len came to work he read the patient's psychiatric chart but with different eyes.. As he read and noticed negative reactions to what he was reading, he would pray asking forgiveness for judging the patient and end with offering his love to God and the patient.. Sure, other medical people were seeing the patients, but what happened during this time was extremely unpredicted. In two months patients were being let out of their locked rooms. Within two years they had been discharged from the

locked wards. I believe what he did was pray that he could see these patients with new eyes through the love of Jesus (not with pictures of their disability and illness). That love must have come through, for many now responded to treatment. They received healings – they were freed from the mental chains that bound them or the demons that were in them.

Prayer made a difference!

Were there really demons in the man Jesus healed. I don't know. I like to think of them in this way; the demon of depression or hysteria, the demon of multiple personalities, the demon of anger, the demon of fear, certainly the demon of our sins, and the demons of poverty and racism and on and on.

And yet I have to listen to such a person as Harvey Cox a theologian at Harvard Divinity School says, "I am convinced that modern liberal theologians have too easily discarded the idea of trans-personal forces of evil. ...He says that in his opinion a century that has witnessed Auschwitz and Hiroshima and Gulag is in no position to laugh off the ugly reality of diabolical forces that seem capable of sweeping people up in their energies."

Yes, we do need Jesus and those gifted medical people who are part of our physical and emotional care, but we also need to add the spiritual disciplines to our daily life and know they are important – not as an alternative to be used off and on, but as extremely needed practices for healing. Spiritual endeavors help us to understand that even though our illnesses are like enemies, that even with enemies, Jesus says "You have heard that it was said,

‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself. But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father who is heaven.’
The love of Jesus through us and others is powerful and transformational.

Dr. Naomi Reemen a well known author and physician, tells of an Easter morning she attended an Episcopal Church in Utah. The service was celebrated by a Native American Bishop. Most of those gathered for the service were Navaho people. Dr. Reemen was touched by the beauty of the service.

The bishop preached and read scripture in Navaho with a voice full of emotion. Naomi said he glanced toward her and her friends, realized that they could not understand him, and then started to repeat his sermon in English. His English was perfect, but the passion of the first reading was just not there. He struggled on, then he stopped, looked up and spoke from the depths of his heart. “This man Jesus, This man Jesus, He is good medicine.

The Gospel says, “In the synagogue, they asked, “what is this? A new teaching—with authority! This man commands even the unclean spirits and they obey him.” Yes, This man Jesus, He is good medicine. In that we can rejoice. Oh,, did I say, This man Jesus uses us to be Good Medicine for ourselves and others. With the guidance of Jesus we are Good Medicine. *Amen*