

St. David's Presbyterian Church
St. John's, NL
"Experiencing Jesus' Healing"
Dr. J. Dent

February 8, 2009
Fifth Sunday of Epiphany

Let me begin by giving greetings from St. Matthew's, Grand Falls where I led the services at the beginning of January. Then let me also bring greetings from Jerry Tankersley, Senior Minister at Laguna Beach Presbyterian Church of the PCUSA, where Lynn and I were last week. Then let me also bring greetings from Dr. John Townsend and Dr. Henry Cloud, who are Christian psychologists who led and founded the leadership workshop we went to in Laguna Beach. Finally, let me extend my greetings from my mother Dorothy in Walnut Creek in N. California who was here last Summer, to all who met her and enjoyed her company and visit, a warm hello to you all.

You can see why the greetings of the Bible are there in the New Testament, not only because it was the custom of the time in letter writing, but also it was a way to make and keep connection, a way to encourage positive relationship. It's why there are so many names and families there in the Old and New Testaments, because this is the way to identify connections to people, family connections. And even if they are funny names to you and to me, remember it is someone's family, and identifies who and where they come from.

The whole message of the Scripture is summed up in what was talked about in the 1 Corinthians 9 passage, the "gospel," the "good news." This good news is about how God wants relationship with each of us. I didn't understand this as a child. I thought Christianity was just a going-to-church thing, like going to scouts or going to the community choir, that kind of thing. But then when we moved from S. California to N. California, and I had a new experience. My family had quit the church due to the mental breakdown of the minister and the politics of the denomination, and now a couple of my music classmates in high school invited me to a home Bible Study. There I found the love of God and the caring of young women and men my age. There I committed myself to God and God's ways.

In that little Bible Study group, they accepted me with all my faults and listened to me as well as my poor attempts at humour. I suppose that's what a friend does. And I felt safe with them. That was my first serious church

experience. So that's where my chosen Christian roots began, and most of those friends in the bible study went to a large Presbyterian church in Walnut Creek. So I went there too, and publicly declared my allegiance to the Lord in that congregation. And just about 35 years here I am, a long ways from California, but close to you and Lynn's family and place of origin.

We read the Scriptures today with a great deal of interest, at least those of us who are hurting. We hear from Isaiah that those of us who need strength and hope can receive such from the Lord. We hear from the Psalms, that God binds up the wounded hearts, the broken hearted. But how is it that God can actually do such a thing?

God peaks our interest a bit in these portions of Scripture. He lets us know that He is concerned about the state of hearts, as well as our heads. Sometimes we find it difficult to go beyond our intellectual reflections and to the heart. There at the heart level we find our longing for relationship, not only to God but also to one another. It's not that our heads are bad, it's just that we are often cut off from our feelings, the part of us that does the valuing, whether consciously or unconsciously.

So, for example, if we were beat up as a child, whether emotionally or physically, then this will have serious consequences in our adult relating to others. All of us have a background that most of our friends and extended relatives might not even know about. This background forms our root identity. If you go back to San Marino, where I grew up, you will know a lot more about me. Similarly, if I go to where you grew up and you were to tell me what happened to you there, I would know a lot more about you.

This is the part of us that often needs healing. This is the part in James 5, that instructs us to confess our sins to one another that we might be healed. That is also the part of Scripture that informs us about prayer with the anointing oil, a simple act that gives whatever infirmity or malady to God. This is something the Presbyterian church does, something I do and in our Book of Worship is prayers and readings for this occasion.

So it all starts with us identifying and being courageous enough to talk about our hurts with another person. This is often not so easy. We risk exposing parts of ourselves that we don't like to another human being and look for affirmation and care. It's one thing to confess our sins to God quietly, as we

do here Sunday by Sunday. It's another thing to confess our sins to one another to be healed. Now you may think that your sins are only those sins that you have committed either willfully or not. But there are also those sins which have been committed against you. These are still there, often eating us up on the inside, taking lots of energy away from us. So God suggests we give these back to Him, in forgiving the ones who have hurt us and receiving the support we need from other safe people in our lives now.

I believe the little video that we see in Mark's first chapter of how Jesus' ministry began, is a way into how we need to begin to see the experience of healing in a different light. Many of us have strange and dramatic images of healing ministry. But if you look at what Jesus did, sure there might have been some strange stuff, but most of it was just caring and connecting with people.

Yes, he healed the physically ill, such as Simon Peter's mother in law, which tells you at least one of the disciples was married. She was healed and began to serve, I believe as she wanted to serve, not forced to serve. Others Jesus met had what we might call mental illnesses, and Jesus healed those as well. He touched the people where they were, even those demonized. Demonization can mean a variety of conditions, from a person willfully and openly giving themselves to evil, as well as a person listening to the abusive tapes in their heads of brutal family members and so called "friends." Jesus changed lives and freed people from a whole multitude of spiritual issues, depression, actual demonic terror, abuse and a whole list of others.

He did so simply by connecting with people. Many of us are so disconnected from what is going on inside, that it takes quite a number of exercises just to quiet down on the inside, and begin to take account of what's going on in our lives. I believe Jesus not only cared for people in connecting with them where they needed to be loved most, but he also was able to receive care and connection, both from God early in the morning, and when he asked for his friends to be with him in the dreaded middle of the night on the Mount of Olives before his so called trial and being tortured to death. He needed God and others. So do we.

So you shouldn't be surprised when I say that the first step to a greater experience of the healing power of Jesus is to say where you need him in your life. Where do you need others? For affirmation, support, mutual

confession, care, for objectivity and perspective, as well as for encouragement in the faith. How is that for a start?

On Monday nights starting tomorrow at 7 for 11 weeks, St. Thomas Anglican is doing a course called "Hiding from Love." This is taught on DVD by Dr. Townsend who led our course in California. Here is a summary of the contents of the course: When you experience emotional injury, fear, shame, or pride your first impulse is to hide the hurting parts of yourself from God, others, even yourself. Often you've learned these hiding patterns during childhood to protect yourself in a threatening environment. The problem is that when you hide your injuries and frailties, you isolate yourself from the very things you need in order to heal and mature. What served as protection for a child becomes a prison to an adult. In *Hiding from Love*, Dr. Townsend helps you to explore thoroughly the hiding patterns you've developed and guides you toward the healing grace and truth that God has built into safe, connected relationships with himself and others. For this course, spaces are very limited so there is an interview to simply ask you if you can commit to the time and to be open and confidential in a group. In the future, we may lead similar courses here. Please talk to me if you are interested for the course starting tomorrow or in the future.

All of us need some healing in some parts of us. As we re-examine this part of the Lord's ministry to us and through us, let us gain hope again for positive change in ourselves, and trust God for the same in those around us.

Let us pray.