

Second Sunday of Lent, March 8, 2009, Year B

St. Bartholomew's Anglican Church in the Town of Tonawanda, N.Y

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Associate Rector Scripture: Romans 8:31-39

“Jesus Christ – Compassionate Healer”

“Jesus summoned His twelve disciples and gave them authority over unclean spirits, to cast them out, and to heal every kind of disease and every kind of sickness.” (Matthew 10:1)

The New Testament is rich with the compassion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ – which is indeed part of the character of Almighty God. We are given example after example of Jesus, God's Word Incarnate – healing the illness and brokenness of those who come to Him, for example – Jesus' healing of Peter's mother in law, in Capernaum. Jesus is an awesome example showing to us a real compassion for the needs of others – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. How often it is that we only think of healing as the physical – asking for God to heal some infirmity, some pain, and or some disease that has set upon either ourselves or the ones we love. Today – I believe that we need to look at the promises of Jesus Christ – and how when we let Him – He can heal our pains and tortures – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I have got to tell you today – that it is only in Jesus Christ – the compassionate healer – that we can be made whole – and experience true inner healing!

In the Galilee region, where Jesus carried out much of His ministry - Capernaum is a town where many people came to Jesus for healing. The Gospels tell us that they were big on need – lining up by the droves to be healed - but they were apparently quite short on repentance and faith. In fact, Jesus warns Capernaum about that very fact: *“And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment, than for you.”* (Matthew 11:23-24)

Jesus spent quite a bit of time ministering to lepers, and others who were considered sinful, unclean, outcasts of society. Lepers had to announce themselves to those around them by shouting “Unclean” when anyone was nearby. Can you just imagine the emotional scars – probably even greater than the physical scarring and loss of limbs? Those who were considered unclean lived amongst abandonment, rejection, hatred, anger, mockery, and abuse. Jesus reached out to these who were unclean – but more importantly Jesus reached them inwardly as He touched and affirmed their faith and importance in the eyes of God – and then restoring them to a right place in society by instructing them to go to the priest so that their restoration could be certified. In Luke chapter 17 – Jesus healed ten lepers – but sadly only one returns to Jesus to give glory to God. Jesus asks those people who were present where the other nine are – but then turns to the now healed Samaritan and says: *“Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”* (Luke 17:19)

Another time Jesus was on the way to bring Jairus' daughter back to life when He was stopped by the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. This poor woman who had endured suffering with hemorrhaging, spending all she had on doctors, living in the despair and the emotional trauma of uncleanness as well as the isolation, anger, rejection and shame that went with it – somehow knew that if she could only touch the hem of Jesus' garment - that her life would change. She did touch His garment – and sure enough her bleeding instantly stopped. Mark's Gospel says *“The woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, “Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction.”* (Mark 5:33-34)

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Jesus compassionately and selflessly stopped what He was doing, and the mission He was on for Jairus' daughter, to speak with this woman. Jesus compassionately listened to her story, - and her telling Him the "whole truth." Jesus listened - giving her His undivided attention. He had already given her His power and healing, but He didn't rush off -and instead He heard the depth of her faith and then He told her that it was her faith that healed her!

God is merciful to those who believe. Notice also that Jesus commanded her to "go in peace." Jesus bestowed upon her His "Shalom," what we would call - His peace. Jesus restored her to society, breaking those bonds of isolation, financial worry, despair and hopelessness. Jesus told her to "*Go in peace and be healed of your affliction.*" Think about it - peace or Shalom - better yet, inner peace or Shalom. How interesting it is that we always seem to label Shalom or peace giving it only the meaning of solitude and tranquility - and never connect it with these fuller meanings: completeness, soundness, and welfare. True shalom, true peace is restoration of health, restoration of mind, and restoration of spirit - and it can only come from God Himself - in the person of Jesus Christ - the compassionate healer.

I would ask you to listen to these words from Psalm 145: "*The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in loving kindness. The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works.*" (Psalm 145:8-9) **To have compassion is to love tenderly, to pity, to show mercy, to be full of eager yearning.** It is important that our own faith is such that does not doubt or ignore Christ's love and compassion. How often it is that we read of or hear people say that there are no miracles, or that there is no need for miracles today! There are some who think that miracles are somehow a sign or proof of Christ's deity, His divinity - never stopping to think that miracles and healing are the full and perfect expression of His compassion. We see evidence in the Scriptures of Jesus' healing people purely because of His compassion. We see examples right here today - in His church of the many healings and deliverances from cancer and other ailments - purely because of His compassion - and a great deal of faith.

In 1999 - I was suffering from constant pain in my right leg. There was no sitting position that was comfortable for me for more than a minute or two or I would be hit with searing pain. I had virtually lost the use of that leg after my right hip replacement two years earlier. I had undergone several procedures to try to freeze the nerves, and had reached my limit of seven for that year for nerve blocks - and it was only June! We were blessed to go on a unique intergenerational trip to Israel, with our church from Jacksonville, Florida. I was limited in my exploration due to my leg - and I missed the top of Megiddo - staying on the bus - while Marilyn, John and Theresa climbed to see the Jezreel Valley. A few days later, in the evening, we were on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, singing praise songs and tales of our travels. One of the men, named Will, stood up and said "there is someone here tonight in need of our prayer, and we need to lay hands on him." He walked over to me and put his hands on my shoulders - and quickly so did everyone else - praying for God's mercy and healing. I remember feeling such love and caring - and I was overcome with a sense of great faith that "tomorrow I was going to be healed!"

That next day - June 22, we left the Kibbutz where we stayed and ventured south to the Jordan River. Some young people on the trip were going to be baptized and Fr. Neil offered to assist anyone that wanted to "reaffirm" their baptismal vows in the Jordan. Marilyn and I gladly volunteered. We donned the white gowns and headed to Yardenit - a traditional baptismal site. Marilyn went first and Fr. Neil and I assisted her submersion. I was next. I went back and

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under the water – coming up to a sensation of everyone and everything being surrounded by a white light. It was so bright and I kept telling everyone. Next – I felt a sudden burning in my right thigh, followed by numbness, and then a remarkable absence of any pain! It was – and still is gone! I remember being able to leap up the steps out of the Jordan – grateful for what Jesus had just done – and fully aware that it was Him who had delivered me from that constant torture of pain. He had given me the gift of faith to expect a miracle. You have to have faith to expect a healing to receive a healing. Jesus told us the exact conditions that He requires for us to receive any blessing that He has promised: *"Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you."* (Mark 11:24) Believe your prayer has been heard when you pray!

Today's New Testament lesson from Romans 8, by the Apostle Paul, should serve as great encouragement that it is not the intention of Almighty God for us to suffer and be kept from a loving relationship with Him. He sent Jesus to the cross – so that we might be restored – restored to the right relationship intended for mankind, from the beginning. Free from sin and able to come to God for forgiveness when we fall; free from death – from eternal damnation *"For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."* (Romans 8:38-39) Also from Paul – in that same letter are these words of clarity and faith in the restoration that is found in Jesus: *"Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death."* (Romans 8:1-2) Remarkable enough, that evening, along the shore of the Galilee, another man, named Tom, came over to me – after the prayers – and told me: "God wants me to tell you – "There is NO condemnation." He repeated this to me – and suddenly I felt free! I really and truly felt free!

I want to suggest to you today that just as Jesus went to the cross to free us from sin and death – offering eternal life and forgiveness of sins repented, He also took our illness and disease with Him – offering healing to those who will faithfully receive it. The words of Peter's first letter ring true: *"He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed."* (1Peter 2:24) The Prophet Isaiah proclaims the same: *"But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed."* (Isaiah 53:5)

Jesus said *"The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; repent and believe in the gospel."* (Mark 1:15) Through the innocent suffering of Jesus on His cross, the righteous anger of God has been satisfied and through His redeeming power and mercy – we are able to be reconciled with God. **We receive the fruit of Jesus' ultimate sacrifice through repenting** –turning away from our sins – placing our trust and confidence in Our Lord Jesus Christ – and allowing God to transform us – changing our sinful nature. We must go before the cross and lay our sins, our burdens, our weaknesses at the feet of Jesus. We receive complete and total forgiveness there and give God permission to crucify our sinful nature with Christ. Then we are to move into a more powerful obedience, faithfulness, and righteousness, by the power of the Holy Spirit living within us.

Remember the words of Psalm 103: *"Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, And forget none of His benefits; Who*

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pardons all your iniquities, Who heals all your diseases.” (Psalm 103:1-3) God has promised – and only God delivers! The words from 2 Corinthians are certainly fitting: *“For as many as are the promises of God, in Him they are yes.”* (2 Corinthians 1:20)

We are blessed that we have been given the cure! The only solution to what ails the world today is found in **Jesus Christ – the Compassionate Healer** – through the power of His Word. The Word of God has incredible power; Jesus healed the sick and cast out evil just by speaking His Word. In the beginning, the universe was created simply by speaking it into being. **We need to recognize and trust that power – having a faith like Abraham** – not based on anything that we have seen – but knowing that God will do everything that He has promised! The prophet Isaiah recognized that power proclaiming: *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”* (Isaiah 40:21) He continues: *“those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; They will mount up with wings like eagles, They will run and not get tired, They will walk and not become weary.”* (Isaiah 40:31)

As we prepare for an awesome healing service this Saturday at 4 PM, with Bishop Atwood, I would ask you to open your Pew Bibles to page 1210 - James 5:13-16 and ask God to give you the courage to come forth, in faith, and seek the healing that Christ has already paid for. Ask Him to prepare your hearts and minds as you seek His healing. *“Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”*

My brothers and sisters in Christ – today I encourage you to search no more for healing anywhere - except in the one who created and saved us – for by His sacrifice and redemption we are not only freed from sin and death – but from sickness. Trust in Him and what He has already done for you – and be clothed in His healing love. As Jesus told many – and tells each one of us here today, personally: ***“Your faith has made you well!”***