

In our Bible stories for today, it is clear that faithful people suffer in body and in spirit; and it is equally clear from these Bible passages that God is ready and willing and able to heal. It is not so apparent however, in our current day situations.

How are we to work with the reality that though God says

I'll go after the lost, I'll collect the strays, I'll doctor the injured,
We still feel lost and alone and wounded and ill; even in the church; even in Tontogany?

In preparation for our anointing service, I would like to put forth 3 Christian understandings of suffering.

The first is that **we have a God who enters into our suffering.**

Many religions believe that God created the heavens and the earth and then disappeared. Our sacred text tells a different story; it tells a story of God's mothering care. The Hebrew language says it something like this: "in the beginning God created the heaven and the earth; and the earth was chaotic and useless and darkness covered the face of the deep and a Spirit from God brooded over the waters (like a mother bird broods over her nest). The Holy Spirit could, I suppose, stand aloof and say, "If you will just see all this from my perspective and you will smile", but instead, we are told the Holy Spirit groans for us with signs too deep for words. The Holy Spirit comes to comfort us when we are suffering and to advocate for us when we are being treated unjustly.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor and professor. During WWII, he opposed the Nazi movement. He had the opportunity to come to the US for a time, but while here, he wrote a friend:

"I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people..."

He returned to Germany, worked in a variety of ways to oppose Hitler. Bonhoeffer was imprisoned for his convictions and his conspiracies. On April 9, in the year of our LORD 1945, just days before the war ended, Bonhoeffer was executed.

In the same way, God refuses to let us suffer alone. When God enters into our suffering, God does so not just in a sympathetic way, but in a bodily, sacrificial, healing way.

When Jesus Christ came as a baby he demonstrated God's willingness to become as vulnerable to this world as anyone of us.

We are given no evidence that his body was spared from illness,
but we are told stories about his hunger and thirst, his despair in the face of his friend and cousin's death, John the Baptist;
his weariness after a long day of work.

We are told stories of his skin being torn and his body bleeding;
he had relational suffering:
Jesus was misunderstood,
casually dismissed by some
and sharply rejected by others;
Jesus knew the feeling of being despised by those he loved and
being betrayed
and even being mistaken for the devil.

We are told that Jesus was tempted in every way, just as we are.

Therefore, through the physical presence of Jesus Christ, who is Emmanuel, God with us, we know that God does not sit in heaven ignoring our pain, but comes to live among us, sharing in all of our suffering as one who loves us.

The second understanding is this:

Whether healthy or suffering, God calls us to serve.

Suffering does not mean that we cannot faithfully serve God.

Ruth knew the suffering of losing her spouse, yet she models steadfast devotion to her mother-in-law;

Jeremiah is locked in stocks and then thrown into a cistern, yet continues to speak for YHWH

Shiprah and Puah grew up under the oppressive regime of Pharaoh, but as midwives they refused to kill babies, but instead served God and were blessed with families of their own.

While I often pray for someone's healing then add "that they may better serve God", Marva Dawn, author of Being Well When We're Ill challenges this thinking. She carries in her body a variety of chronic illnesses and She writes of her Bible study regarding suffering:

"I could find no texts that say anything about any incapacity to serve God when our infirmities encumber us."

Henri Nouwen's story affirms the ministry of the suffering:

Nouwen was a Catholic priest, successful author, and professor who taught at such places as Notre Dame, Harvard and Yale. He writes this in his book In Jesus' Name:

After 25 years of the priesthood,
I found myself praying poorly,
living somewhat isolated from other people and very much preoccupied with burning issues.
Everyone said that I was doing really well, but something inside was telling me that my success was putting my own soul in danger..;
I woke up one day with the realization that I was living in a very dark place and that the term "burnout" was a convenient psychological translation for a spiritual death.
In the midst of this I kept praying,
'LORD, show me where you want me to go and I will follow you, but please be clear and unambiguous about it!'

Well, God was.

In the person of Jean Vanier, the founder of the l'Arche communities for the mentally handicapped people, God said,
'Go and live among the poor in spirit, and they will heal you.'" (10-11).

If you have sat with the dying or played with the disabled or conversed with a person who has had a stroke, then you know that though the healing power of God has not fully restored them, they are nonetheless instruments of God's grace for your own healing.

They are, in the midst of their suffering, faithful servants of God.

The third understanding is this: God invites us and expects us to be agents of healing.

As Jesus sent out his followers two by two to heal, to deliver, to proclaim the Kingdom of God, so too God expects us to take hold of the authority of Jesus' name and be agents of God's power to make things whole.

You have chosen the identity of "People of Prayer".

As people of prayer you join together to hold up those who are ailing;
by doing so, your gatherings become a place
where the patient meets the Physician;
where the torn meet the Mender
where the bound meet the Therapist
where the infected meet the Nurse

As people of prayer you become the basin where the cleansing waters gather to refresh the weary and cleanse the wounded.

As people of prayer you become the call button that alerts the courts of heaven that the generous and skilled healing power of God is needed right here in Tontogany.

Call, people of prayer.

Call on the healing Spirit of Christ to be with us now, this day, and to stay with us until we are made whole.

Prayer and Anointing for Healing

In the Power of the Holy Spirit through the Community of Faith at Tontogany

Scripture readings:

James 5:13-16

Are any among you suffering?

They should pray.

Are any cheerful?

They should sing songs of praise.

Are any among you sick?

They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them,
anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord.

The prayer of faith will save the sick,
and the Lord will raise them up;

and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.

Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed.

The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective

Isa. 40:31

Those who wait for the Lord
shall renew their strength,
they shall mount up with wings like eagles,
they shall run and not be weary,
they shall walk and not faint.

Matthew 7:7-8

Jesus said:

Ask and it will be given you;
seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you.

**For every one who asks receives,
and the one who seeks finds,
and to the one who knocks it will be opened.**

Friends in Christ,
God knows our needs before we ask,
and in our asking
prepares us to receive the gift of grace.
Let us open our lives to God's healing presence,
forsaking all that separates us
from God and neighbor.
Let us be mindful not only of personal evil
but also of our communal sins
of family, class, race, and nation.
Let us confess to God whatever has wounded us
or brought injury to others,
that we may receive mercy
and become for each other
ministers of God's grace.
I appeal to you therefore,
brothers and sisters,
by the mercies of God,
to present your bodies as a living sacrifice,
holy and acceptable to God,
which is your spiritual worship.

To the triune God,
the source of all love and all life,
let us offer our prayers.

For all who are in need of healing,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who are disabled by injury or illness,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who are troubled by confusion or pain,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all whose increasing years bring weariness,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all about to undergo surgery,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who cannot sleep,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

For all who practice the healing arts,
Lord, in your mercy, hear our prayer.

Into your hands, O God,
we commend all for whom we pray,
trusting in your mercy;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.
I will have oil there and pour it as I pray:

Gracious God, source of all healing,
in Jesus Christ you heal the sick
and mend the broken.
We thank you for this oil
pressed from the fruits of the earth,
given to us as a sign
of healing and forgiveness,
and of the fullness of life you give.
By your Spirit,
come upon all who are anointed with this oil
that they may receive your healing touch
and be made whole,
to the glory of Jesus Christ our Redeemer.
Amen

Spirit of the living God, present with us now,
enter _____ in body, mind, and spirit,
and heal *her/him* of all that harms *her/him*.
We pray through the authority of Jesus Christ, our wounded and risen LORD, Amen.

The LORD's Prayer

Our Father who art in heaven
Hallowed be Thy Name.
Thy Kingdom Come.
They will be done on earth as it is in heaven.
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.
Lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.
For Thine in the Kingdom, and the Power and the Glory forever.
Amen.

O Savior, in This Quiet Place

390

ST. STEPHEN CM

Fred Pratt Green, 1974; alt. 1988

William Jones, 1789



1. O Sav-ior, in this qui-et place, Where an-y-one may kneel,
2. If pain of bod-y, stress of mind, De-stroys my in-ward peace,
3. If self up-on its sick-ness feeds And turns my life to gall,
4. You nev-er said, "You ask too much," To an-y trou-bled soul.



- I al- so come to ask for grace, Be- liev-ing You can heal.
In prayer for oth-ers may I find The se-cret of re-lease.
Let me not brood up-on my needs, But sim-ply tell You all.
I long to feel Your heal-ing touch; Will You not make me whole?



5. But if the thing I most desire
Is not Your way for me,
May faith, when tested in the fire,
Prove its integrity.
6. Of all my prayers, may this be chief:
Till faith is fully grown,
Lord, disbelieve my unbelief,
And claim me as Your own.

Text: Copyright © 1974 by Hope Publishing Company, Carol Stream, IL 60188. All rights reserved. Used by permission.

Song of sending

Shine, Jesus Shine

Shine, Jesus Shine fill this town with the Father's Glory
Blaze Spirit Blaze set our hearts on fire
Flow river flow flood our people with grace and healing
Send forth Your Word and let there be LIFE.

LORD, we need your healing power
In Your people come this hour
Jesus healer of all diseases
Come in mercy and release us
Shine through us; shine through us

Shine, Jesus Shine fill this town with the Father's Glory
Blaze Spirit Blaze set our hearts on fire
Flow river flow flood our people with grace and healing
Send forth Your Word and let there be LIFE.