

# “The Best Medicine”

Preached at Community United Methodist Church  
Sunday, 3 May 2009

Text: Acts 3:1-10

I wonder what would have happened if the lame man realized who Peter and John were, if he knew that they were disciples of Jesus of Nazareth, the one who had gone about the land healing many of conditions ranging from blindness to leprosy to chronic bleeding to paralysis. I wonder if it would have changed his request for alms knowing that they had once been a part of the group who Jesus sent out by twos empowered to heal the sick.

Would even knowing that it was possible to be cured and healed have mattered? Or had a lifetime of lameness made it impossible for that man to even imagine a life of wholeness, a life past his next meal?

A paralytic, begging by the side of the road, next to the city gate, or near one of the gates of the temple in Jerusalem was not an unusual sight in those days. The stories of Jesus contain many accounts of his ministry to such folk.

For anyone afflicted with a condition that rendered them unable to walk in that time when there were no social safety nets – no Medicare, Medicaid, or disability insurance, nor laws to insure fair opportunity to the disabled – the best such a person could do was to beg, hoping that passersby would give a little. Unable to walk from birth, all he knew was a life of begging for alms – donations of money, food, or clothing that Jews were encouraged to give to the poor. It had never occurred to him to ask for anything more. His expectation and imagination were limited to what it would take to get through another day. But then, how could he have had aspirations for anything more? Afflicted from birth, he had never known himself as anything other than a lame beggar.

So when Peter and John happen by on their way to the temple the lame man did what he always did and asked them for a donation. We can imagine his hands outstretched and his face turned toward the ground so as not to insult the potential donors.

It took no more than a moment for a Spirit-filled Peter to size up the lame man's situation and respond with no less than five gifts – five gifts that would be more healing for the lame man than any amount of money he could have received.

“Look at us,” Peter says. His first gift of healing is to simply make eye contact with the lame man. It's hard for us to understand just how powerful this was, for the lame man lived in a world in which there was no such thing as social equality or the inalienable human rights of the individual. That lame man was a bottom-feeding outcast that society saw more as a burden than a person. For him to even meet the gaze of one above his station would have been giving insult.

But when Peter says, “look at us,” he invites this outcast to a place of equality. For a moment at least, the lame man became no less a man, and no less a member of society, than anyone else. For a moment at least, he was restored to community.

Peter then offers his second gift of healing – his honest generosity. “I have no silver or gold,” he says, “but what I do have I give to you.” He knows himself and his gifts. He knows that he doesn't have what the lame man wants but he knows what he can give. Most importantly, Peter is unconditionally generous. He doesn't first perform a needs assessment on the lame man or have him fill out an application form. Peter does not approach the lame man leery that the guy is out to game the system. He simply offers what he can give him.

And what Peter can give – his third gift of healing to the lame man -- is what he has received from God through Jesus and the Holy Spirit. As one who has received the life-changing, and life-giving love and healing of Jesus in his own life, Peter offers what he has received to the lame man. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...,” he says. Or more accurately translated for our ears: “As the agent of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, calling upon his authority and power...” In effect, Peter offers the lame man Jesus... all that Jesus' presence would have meant had he been there at that time – Jesus' love, Jesus' kindness, Jesus' faith, Jesus' encouragement, and Jesus' life-changing healing.

Having offered Jesus, Peter then offers a fourth gift of healing – a cure for the man's lameness. But it is a gift that he doesn't just push on the lame man with the triumphant

declaration, "You are healed!" Instead, Peter offers the man a choice. "Rise up and walk." It sounds like a command, but the lame man must choose to obey it.

For the lame man to attempt to stand – to attempt what was impossible all his life – was risky. What if it were all a cruel joke? A moment of wonder and hope would turn into just another humiliation. What if he could now stand and walk, no longer entirely dependent on others? He could no longer, in good conscience, beg for a living. No longer exiled to the edge of society by a disability he would have to take his responsible place in it. And what would he do if someday his walk took him past a lame beggar by the gate of the temple?

If he really was cured – if he was healed – his life would never be the same.

After a moment, we can imagine the man cautiously reaching out a hand toward Peter in a gesture that said, "okay, I'll try."

It is then that Peter gives the man his fifth gift of healing. Peter touches him. He reaches out, takes the man's hand and raises him up. A seemingly perfunctory action, it spoke volumes in their culture. For to touch one who was afflicted as that lame man was would have been to touch one who was thought to be cursed by God. Peter broke the boundary and the taboo to make person-to-person contact. It was, in a way, a welcome back into the human race. It was surely a way for Peter to give supportive love to one who had ever only received money. And it was a part of God's way to heal – body, emotion, spirit, and relationship – through his servant Peter. It was, without a doubt, the best medicine the lame man could have received!

#### Five gifts

- an offer of mutual relationship
- honest, unconditional generosity
- the love of Jesus Christ
- a physical cure
- the touch of one person and one heart, to another.

All a part of one healing. One return to wholeness. One restoration to being the creation that God had intended. One renewed life.

That's what healing is about. It's more than a cure. Indeed, healing may not cure of the what we think is the problem. But healing is so much more.

Healing is about the creator/healer God meeting us where we are in our affliction and woundedness and restoring us in mind, soul, relationship, and maybe even body. Healing is about restoring to us the truth that our sickness made us forget – that we are worthwhile, valuable, precious, beloved children of God no matter what condition we are in. Healing is about restoring us to a point of balance where we can know true peace, the peace that allows us see our own situations with clarity and hope, and a peace that allows us to approach others with generosity, forgiveness, and grace. And healing is what allows us to be wounded yet persons through which God's love – the love of Christ – flows to each other. In fact, it is our own individual woundedness and affliction that gives each of us the potential to be a healer, should each of us to see our own suffering as arising from the human condition we all share.<sup>1</sup>

Our Lord, our God is the perfect healer. We do not have to live bent and closed in around our own pain, affliction, or woundedness as if it is all that we are. We can open ourselves to God's healing that will give wholeness and peace. A healing that will enable us to live abundantly beyond whatever about us is broken. A healing that will allow us to be healers of others, even if it means we are wounded healers.

If you look and listen, you will find God offering to heal you – offering to heal us. Let God heal you. Let God heal us.

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<sup>1</sup>Nouwen, Henri J. M., The Wounded Healer (New York: Image Books, 1979), 88