

We all want and need healing, in one way or another. Physical ailments are the most obvious, especially with age. Yet there is also a need for emotional healing, healing of the mind and heart. There are many modes of healing, many therapies. In our scientific and technological age, we may put our faith mostly in modern medicine. Yet there are many therapies that people experience as healing....running or mountain hiking... swimming... perhaps quiet walks in nature. My family always used to say that swimming in salt water cures just about anything! Anna Jaques Hospital and many seniors use the *warm* pool of the YWCA for physical therapy. FDR famously built a home in *Warm Springs*, Georgia. Many of us try acupuncture, chiropractic, cranio-sacral therapy, and many other alternative medicine therapies. We don't need research studies to tell us that *Pet Therapy* is good for health, especially the companionship that elders often need. *Music* therapy is another obvious activity that usually benefits both mind and body. Add some form of *dance* to the music, and you have even more wholistic healing! So many modes of healing! And I am fond of the saying, maybe coined by Reader's Digest, that "*Laughter* is best medicine!" Nothing like seeing the lighter side of life! But let's turn for a few moments to the stories of Jesus regarding spiritual healing.

The gospel of Mark is the shortest gospel; it goes quickly from one story to the next, so many of them are healing stories. Jesus was known as a healer, so crowds followed him everywhere. This morning we heard of the woman who is healed by simply touching the hem of his cloak. Jesus feels energy going out of him, and after seeing her, he says "your faith has made you well." Jesus was indicating that it was not just touching the clothing, but something inside of the woman, her faith, or we could say her "hope," participated in the healing.

Jesus means that her faith, her hope, did indeed "help" her healing. This does not imply a reverse logic that lack of healing means someone has poor faith, faulty faith. An analogy would be: "If you drive carefully, you are more likely avoid accidents."... Which does not imply a reverse logic that getting into an accident means you were not driving carefully! So it

seems true to say that the woman with the bleeding was “helped” by her faith, helped by her hope; She participated in her own healing. We might even say: God helps those who help themselves. She was persistent in reaching out for healing.

So like the woman in the story, we too can be persistent in our intentions for good health. And for me, the word faith is not about believing or thinking a certain way. I think the way Jesus uses the word faith... has more to do with “hope and trust.” And we have to remember that Jesus was thoroughly Jewish; he said believe in *God*... believe *also* in me. In all the Psalms, we Praise God for many things, as Psalm 103 says: “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all God’s benefits.” It goes on to say: “who forgives all your sins, who heals all your diseases!” It is an *interfaith* hope, faith and trust that there is a divine source, a universal God, that forgives, redeems, and heals. And sometimes the healing is connected with forgiving, with the healing of the heart. Jesus made that connection often, saying your sins are forgiven as he was healing someone.

Again, the forgiveness of sins can surely “help” with healing, could participate in the healing, be even necessary for good healing, ... but the reverse logic does not hold... that if you are sick, there must be some sin that caused it, or some lack of faith that caused it. We know that sickness is a part of life and that sickness unto death will come to us all. But our faith says that some degree of healing is always possible at all stages of life... incremental healing... It may be a physical thing, like a little more movement, or it may be something in the mind and heart that still can increase love, increase kindness in all relationships.

So we commit ourselves to live in faith and hope and love, which can bring about some healing - in mind, body, and spirit and I say we are wise to try many modes of healing. Unfortunately, the Christian faith does not say much about the importance of regular exercise and movement. (Paul, in his efforts to focus on higher planes, is sometimes interpreted as denigrating needs of the body, as he contrasts spirit with flesh.) Yet Sports and gym workouts can be healing therapy. And with aging, physical

therapy is one mode of healing. We know that Yoga groups are very strong in this country now, as well as Tai Chi, and with very good reason. Combining bodily exercise with meditation and spiritual intentions for peaceful living has to be a winning combination.

A massage therapist acquainted me with the work and writings of Meir Schneider; he was born about 90% blind, and in his late teens he began many vision exercises and therapies that restored most of his sight. He went to college and grad school and then opened clinics for movement therapy. I think we are all guilty of too much sedentary time. Meir Schneider writes about many clients who have experienced much healing through regular committed physical exercises... I think many of us here have benefitted from physical therapy which IS essentially learning regular physical exercises, strengthening and stretching.

I love the connections between science and faith, reading people like Dr. Bernie Siegel, and Dr. Larry Dossey, and Dr. Herbert Benson. Bernie Siegel did many studies of cancer patients where things like envisioning did help with healing. Herbert Benson did many studies on the "Relaxation Response," showing the value of quiet meditation, especially for heart issues. Dr. Larry Dossey wrote several books on faith, a 1996 book was called "Prayer is Good Medicine." He references many scientific studies, even double-blind ones, that showed that prayer had positive effects on healing. The studies showed that prayer is a universal help in healing, belonging to every faith and creed.

I'll close with a few words about Reikki therapy.... For those of you who don't know, it is sometimes thought of as Energy Medicine, and it has almost close parallels in the early Christian Church. Jesus was said to lay his hands on people, and then the apostles were reported to lay hands on people also with prayers for healing. Now we know from Eastern Medicine that there are energy centers in the body called chakras, as in Acupuncture there are "meridians" with flows of energy..... In Reikki, there can be an intention of laying hands on certain energy centers, top of head, the heart, the digestive area, for example. In Reikki there it seems to me there is also

a faith component ... they teach that you can put your hands *anywhere*, and a flow of energy will then go where it “needs to go.” I’ll tell you about two testimonials regarding Reikki, or the laying on of hands. One current Reikki practitioner reported that her very first experience of Reikki was due to a chronic bronchitis that would not go away. A friend after church asked if she would like a Reikki-type prayer, nothing to lose, so taking a seat, the friend put her hands on her “knees,” (apparently that is one energy area!)... and she felt a rush of energy flow from her head down through her knees, and yes, the chronic bronchitis went away and never happened again!

The second experience I will relate is my own. Quite a few years ago, I went out to the Yoga center at Kripalu for the initial instruction-introduction to Reikki, you know, to find out how the same or how different from Christian laying on of hands. Well, it happened to be a class of about 7 people... and we each took turns lying on a table while all the others did the energy treatment, or laying on of hands. My need at the time turned out to be more emotional than physical; I needed to forgive someone, big-time... (like Jesus saying, forgive, for they know not what they do!). And surprisingly to me, with about 7 people laying hands on head, heart, probably knees and feet also... I became a bucket of tears, and it felt healing to let go, and just let them flow. We know that tears can be a catharsis, a letting go of much that is bound up inside, of hurts that need forgiveness, of things that make your stomach hurt, and your head ache.

So next week, at the end of worship with communion, we will be offering the Christian laying on of hands. Each person wanting it will simply sit quietly, perhaps eyes closed, and with some quite music, receive the loving energy from the hands of those gathered around. Just 1-2 minutes ought to initiate some healing energy. Like the woman in our reading, we too can reach out in faith, trying various therapies, trusting that with faith, hope, and love, some degree of healing is possible in all stages of life! Amen.