

Proper 25
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"Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me."

Through Samuel, God had told King David. "When your days are over, and you rest with your fathers, I will raise up your offspring to succeed you, who will come from your own body, and I will establish his kingdom. He is the one who will build a house for my Name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever" (2 Samuel 7:12-13).

Naturally, people kept looking for this Son of David who would rule forever. Several times in the Gospels, Jesus is called "Son of David." During Jesus' lifetime, this had become a Messianic term. The Messiah: the one who would save Israel.

And this is how Bartimaeus called to Jesus. "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me." He was loud, and he was insistent, to the point that those around him tried to shush him. Bartimaeus was not going to miss his chance, so he cried out even more loudly. And finally, Jesus heard him and called him to come and make his request. Jesus tells him that his faith has made him well. Faith?

Frederich Beuchner writes in his book *Wishful Thinking*:

"The Gospels depict Jesus as having spent a surprising amount of time healing people. He seems to have suggested a connection between sickness and sin, almost to have seen sin as a kind of sickness. "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick;" he said. "I came not to call the righteous but sinners." (Mark 2:17).

This is entirely compatible, of course, with the Hebrew view of the human being as a psychosomatic unity, an indivisible amalgam of body and soul in which, if either goes wrong, the other is affected. It is significant also that the Greek verb that was used in Jesus' day to mean "to save" also meant "to heal" and the word for "savior" could also mean "physician."

Ever since the time of Jesus, healing has been part of the Christian tradition. Nowadays, it has usually been associated with religious quackery or the lunatic fringe; but as the psychosomatic dimension of disease has come to be taken more and more seriously by medical science, it has regained some of its former respectability. How nice for God to have this support at last."

In my role as a hospice chaplain, I am often asked to pray for healing: pray for patients, their families, and my colleagues, and I do. Early on, I had a really hard time with this, because even if such prayer has positive results, how to account for those who don't get well? Does God love them less? Did I fail to pray for them adequately? Is our faith too small?

With age and perhaps some minor wisdom, I have come to realize a few things. First: There is a vast difference between healing and cure. Most of the people I pray for are unlikely to be cured. That's why they are receiving hospice services. Not that they don't often get better at least for a time, with good care, but for most, the best that medicine has to offer in the way of a cure has failed them. However, there can still be healing, and that can make all the difference in their lives and the lives of their families. It can make all the difference in how they meet their deaths and in how their families grieve.

Second: God is always faithful. If Jesus spent so much of his ministry healing, it has to be because healing is vastly important to the King of the Universe. So when I pray for people for healing, I often tell them that I know that their healing is coming, but that perhaps God will be

delivering it in person. Perhaps it will not happen in this broken world but in the next. I tell their families that though they will miss their loved one terribly, and that really sucks, they will have the joy of knowing that they are well, no longer struggling to breathe, no longer having to manage pain.

Third: In truth, we are all hospice patients seeking healing when cures have failed us. We may not be facing that failure of cure today or tomorrow, but under all the bravado required for daily living, we know we will come to it eventually. The only question is our ability to have faith in God's faithfulness.

Fourth: And when I do get to pray for a colleague or friend with nothing more serious than a sprained ankle, and they do get better, they are apt to start telling people that "Merry healed me!" Then I get to chase them down the hall, yelling, "No, no, no! I prayed for God to heal you."

Frederich Buechner again: "Jesus is reported to have made the blind see and the lame walk, and over the centuries countless miraculous healings have been claimed in his name. Whether we believe in this kind of healing or not, God apparently does.

If your approach to this kind of healing is less ideological and more empirical, you can always give it a try. Pray for it. If it's somebody else's healing you're praying for, you can try at the same time laying your hands on her as Jesus sometimes did. If her sickness involves her body as well as her soul, then God may be able to use your inept hands as well as your inept faith to heal her.

If you feel like a fool as you are doing this, don't let it throw you. You are a fool, of course, only not a damned fool for a change. "

Perhaps we could all pray to be fools for the sake of those who need healing, just not damned fools.