

Pentecost 18C (10/13/2019)

2 Kings 5:1-3, 7-15c

Psalm 111

2 Timothy 2:8-15

**Luke 17:11-19**

*More than a supernatural cure, healing in the biblical sense refers to holistic wellness and peace. It's salvation in broad terms, "the divine spaciousness that comes to human beings in all the tight places where their lives are at risk." You know what's killing you, but what is saving your life right now?*

Healing stories are bittersweet, aren't they? Of course, we're grateful for all healing, and those of us who've experienced healing in extraordinary circumstances may be fundamentally changed by it. There was a man in my childhood congregation, for instance, who survived a serious car accident. And, while he had a permanent limp as a result, he also had a changed temperament, forever more joyful and generous of spirit than he'd been before. I imagine that it was a case of transformative gratitude, much like the Samaritan healed of his leprosy who falls at Jesus' feet in our Gospel from Luke today.

**But, dramatic instances of healing inevitably leave us wondering about all the illnesses and injuries that have no cure.** Jesus asks, "Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they?" We might rightfully ask him, *Were not many more suffering from leprosy in Galilee and Samaria, not to mention Judea and elsewhere? But the others, what about their pain, their exclusion, their hopelessness?*

How many faithful people over the ages have cried out to God for mercy, but have not had their afflictions removed? If Jesus is nothing more than a

medical miracle worker, then he misses the mark on every occasion that a faith healing does not take place. **It must be that healing stories in the Gospels are about more than physical restoration.**

And on this note, a biblical language lesson is in order. Jesus' final remark in our Gospel today, "Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well," centers on the Greek verb *sōzō*, "to save." So, some translations render that phrase, "Your faith has *saved* you." We've often spiritualized the notion of salvation to the extent that it no longer has implications for earthly life. *Are you saved?* has come to mean *Are you among those whose eternal well-being is secure?* But, **salvation in the biblical sense is inextricable from lived experience, incorporating the physical, emotional, social, and spiritual aspects of a person's life.** In the case of the Samaritan healed of his leprosy, salvation is marked by physical health, social reintegration, right orientation toward God, and the irresistible impulse to give thanks and praise. "Get up and go on your way," Jesus tells him, "your faith has saved you."

More than a supernatural cure, healing refers to holistic wellness and peace. It's salvation in broad terms. So, you don't need to be cleansed of leprosy to understand the Samaritan's grateful response to Jesus. **Whatever it is that afflicts you, healing is any experience of spontaneous and unmitigated grace that breaks into your life to enable you to "get up and go on your way," to begin again and again.**

Barbara Brown Taylor recalls being invited to speak at an event where the host provided her with the prompt: “Tell us what is saving your life now.” She reflects:

It was such a good question that I have made it a practice of asking others to answer it as I continue to answer it myself. Salvation is so much more than many of its proponents would have us believe. In the Bible, human beings experience God’s salvation when peace ends war, when food follows famine, when health supplants sickness and freedom trumps oppression. Salvation is a word for the divine spaciousness that comes to human beings in all the tight places where their lives are at risk, regardless of how they got there or whether they know God’s name.<sup>1</sup>

“Salvation is a word for the divine spaciousness that comes to human beings in all the tight places where their lives are at risk.”

So, the question is: **What is saving your life right now?**

I asked this question to a few friends this week and received the following responses, shared with their permission:

So, there are many ways my body isn’t working right now: bad digestion, infertility, autoimmune issues. But my body is working well enough to get me out in the woods, to rock climb, and to dance. The fact that multiple things can be true at once is saving my life right now.

I think what’s saving me right now are the moments when I feel pulled out of the rat race and reminded in a very clear way that I am more than what I do. Those moments happen when I’m out on a run, when I walk away from the pile of dishes on the counter and get on the floor with my babies instead, when I let myself sleep instead of getting up early to get a few things done around the house... when I take a full day off from work.

I would say that [the shift to fall foods], reminding us that we are part of the cycles of creation, and cycles of change, and cycles of death that leads to new life, is good and saving and making us well.

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<sup>1</sup> *Leaving Church*, 226.

My estranged grandfather is visiting (for the first time in nine years...). So, the ability to restrain myself from expressing all the hurt and disappointment I feel is both saving and crushing me.

If I didn't have Communion right now, I would be drowning in my grief over losing my spouse.

Instances of salvation are both large and small, both immediate and enduring, both simple and complex. **Salvation is the place where pain meets grace, where God enters actual human life to share it with us and deliver us to the next place, the next moment, the next reality. It's where the devastation of the cross encounters the promise of the resurrection.**

Dear church, **you know what's killing you. You're keenly aware of "all the tight places where [your life is] at risk." But, where is "divine spaciousness" making room for you to breathe and to hope? What reasons do you have to give thanks and praise to God, if even in a whisper or a sigh? What is saving your life right now?**