

Healing Service Reflection

November 6, 2011

Mark 5:22-24

Dear friends in Christ, I bring you grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus. Amen
Rather than calling this time in the service - a time of reflection – it may more fitting to call it an invitation . . .

For today is not so much a day of words about remembering or about healing – but today is a day of remembering and a day to experience healing.

The ancients believed that something powerful happened when people gathered to pray – to sing – to be silent – to read scripture - to lay on hands – to anoint with oil – to share a meal. They believed that God showed up in a way that was on one hand wrapped in mystery and on the other – as real as bread and wine.

I believe it too. That when we gather to pray our hearts are opened in a very real way to the very heart of God and not only that – but we also, in prayer, join a community of fellow pilgrims on a common journey – we are surrounded by the communion of saints – those who have gone before and those who will come after – raising our praise and our petitions to God.

When we lay on hands, we remember that Jesus reached out his hands and blessed children and healed the sick and we trust that human touch is an instrument of God's healing and empowering.

And when we anoint with oil – we join ourselves to a long tradition of believers who used oil in anointing as a sign of the Spirit's power to comfort, cleanse, heal and bless. Susan Briehl writes, “This is what we do, as people of faith, we lay our hands in blessing upon the frightened child. We mark our beloved with the oil of forgiveness. We anoint a shame-filled sister or an anger-bound brother in the name of the Lord. And when we are the one in need, we pray to receive with faith, the prayers and anointing of others.”

Something powerful happens when God's people gather to pray. Do you hear the invitation – the invitation to remember and experience healing this day? I believe that we are all in need of healing and wholeness – in one way or another. Today is a day to come – to the table, to the font, to light a candle, to write a name, to pray, to be silent, to be blessed.

Susan Briehl and Marty Haugen, authors of the book *Turn my Heart* – from which much of this service was taken or inspired, share these words about the journey of healing and hope in our lives.

“. . . When grief floods our hearts and despair robs us of hope, how can we begin the journey toward healing and wholeness?

Sometimes after a season of sorrow, we look back and realize we were on the journey even when we felt like we could not move. Sometimes, we need others to point the way or to take our hand and lead us. At other times, the path rises up to meet us and we find ourselves on a long and difficult road we did not choose.

There is no timeline, map or direct route. The path is unique to each person, community, situation . . . Some seasons of grief are long; some wounds so deep the scars always remain. We are changed forever; none of us ever returns to the time before our world fell apart.

However, we do not wander aimlessly. We are pilgrims on a sacred journey, being drawn ever more deeply into the heart of God. Christ comes to us while we are wounded and weeping, angry or

confused, crying out for help. The Spirit slowly, persistently, moves within us – comforting and turning our hearts toward hope. God works in many and various ways – through medical care, counseling programs, spiritual guidance, and the power of forgiveness (both given and received) – until we glimpse the grace of God mending what is broken, planting seeds of promise in the soil of our sorrow, bringing hope and healing from the ashes of our dreams, raising us to new life.

We never travel alone. We walk beside our companions, seen and unseen, clinging to God's promise never to abandon us. Our path is carpeted with the prayers of those who have gone this way before us. Their longing and lament, their silent weeping and songs of hope entwine with ours. We, too, will leave our prayers on the path for the sake of those who will follow. And, where we cannot pray, when we have no words and little faith, God who enters and shares our suffering in Jesus, sends his holy spirit to pray for us, “with sighs too deep for words.”

For pilgrims, the journey itself is marked by surprising grace. Week after week God sets a table among us, feeding us with Christ's very presence at the Feast. When we least expect it, God provides streams of mercy for the thirsty soul, soothing balm for the broken spirit, and manna for the hungry heart.”

So I invite you – I invite you to stand – and may you experience the presence of our healing, loving God this day. Amen