



Solemnity of St Luke – October 17, 2010

Isaiah 35.3-6; Luke 4.14-21

A Homily preached by the Venerable M. Ansley Tucker

I wonder if it would surprise you to know that the root words for “healing” (or health) and “salvation” are actually very similar? The word “to heal” comes from an Old English word *haelan*, meaning soundness, or wholeness (health). The word “salvation” comes from the Latin *salus* which also means health, or wholeness. This begins to make sense of that strange line in the Prayer Book Confession at Morning Prayer, in which we lament that “we have left undone those things which we ought to have done, and done those things which we ought not to have done, and there is *no health* in us.”

In other words, we are fragmented. We are fractured. We are at odds – at sixes and sevens, as we say. We are incomplete. We are in a state of disequilibrium. We are not “whole.”

And I’m not just talking about our own selves. I am talking about the entire created order. I am talking about ecosystems and the environment, our political life, our family lives, a planet where this little piggy has roast beef and that little piggy has none. I’m talking about war, and racism, and sexism, and classism. And yes, I’m including that wretched sore toe that has more power to wreak havoc with your plans for the day than you could ever have imagined.

So when we talk about “healing ministries” we are speaking of all that is caught up in the sweep of God’s eternal desire to restore the created order to its intended integrity, simplicity, wholeness, or unity. This is why we Christians speak of “salvation” as the “new creation.”

Now to focus on ourselves for the moment, we say that we human beings are ourselves a nexus of body, mind, and spirit. Notice that I did not say that we are a “composite” of body, mind, and spirit – as if we were made up three separate and non-communicating components. In fact, our body, mind, and spirit are wonderfully intertwined, such that if one aspect of our selves falls into disuse, or atrophy, or sickness, our entire being suffers. To go back to your toe, Woe to the person who irritates you in some way, because even though its only a toe, it makes you cranky!

In fact, it is the rediscovery of this interconnectedness which has brought about the recovery various alternative therapies, which only 50 years ago would have been dismissed as old wives’ tales or sheer quackery. Aromatherapy, chiropractic, various herbal remedies, acupuncture, healing touch, Reiki, relaxation techniques, meditation – all these things have crept back into play as tools in the kit of the mainstream. Just as scientists are learning that if you drop a pebble in a pond in Podunk, sooner or later, it will affect the weather patterns in Calgary, so those involved in the science and art of healing, are learning that a serene spirit, or a strong will, or a strong constitution can affect every other aspect of our interconnected selves. So they are teaching cancer patients to meditate and depressed persons to exercise.

Wholeness, or healing, or “salvation,” is about the restoration of total equilibrium. And interestingly enough, the experience of dis-integration is what theologians refer to as “the human condition,” or “original sin”. Now, please, don’t get stuck on the word “sin.” We’re not describing an action (although individual actions can certainly lead to fragmentation); rather, we’re describing a “state of

being" in which everything just seems naturally to go off the rails. I think the Orthodox Churches frame this very helpfully. Their idea is that the so-called "Fall" (that is, our decline as human community into this state of disarray) resulted in the separation of our head from our heart. Not literally, of course! – what they mean is that our intellect and our will, or our thought and feelings, fell out of communion with each other. And this is why, they say, we can know right thing to do, but just can't do it; it is why our head and our heart so often send us mixed messages. In other words, we lack "wholeness," or "salvation," or "healing".

So our work is cut out for us. Today, we hold up and honour those whose life work assists God in the return to wholeness.

In this context, I want to say a word about prayer, and especially about prayer for healing. I realize it's a little counterintuitive suddenly to be so narrowly focused, when I've just painted a canvas as large as the universe. But, since in a few moments, we will invite any who so desire to come forward and receive prayers for healing, it behoves us to reflect for a moment on what it is we are actually doing, and what we are expecting.

People often ask me, "Does prayer work?" With great respect, I'm not sure this is a very helpful question. It's a little like asking, Why is the White House yellow? It's more that prayer *is* work, and it is a work of the *spirit* which takes its place alongside ministries focused more directly on the *body* and *mind*. Can it have an effect on the body? Of course it can – and sometimes, even a dramatic effect. Just as a surgical intervention can have a dramatic effect on one's state of mind. If we truly believe that we are a nexus and not a composite of body, mind and spirit, this only makes sense.

So what are we doing when we pray for healing? I'll tell you what I am *not* doing. I'm not sending messages into outer space. I'm not really even asking for anything. When I pray for healing I am finding that place inside of me where I most clearly sense the light and presence of God, and then I bring you into that presence and hold you there. My prayer is thus a kind of glue, and my job is to keep your pain and God from falling apart. My job is to participate in the work of *all* healers, which is to bring all that is fractured and fragmented and no longer whole, back together again. I don't have to say anything, I don't have to ask anything, I just have to "do it."

The work of healing is very much larger than the work of prayer, very much larger than the work of medical professionals. It is nothing less than the desire of God's heart, nothing less than the restoration of the entire created order to a peaceable and just equilibrium, to a new creation, where death will be no more, neither sorrow, nor crying, nor pain, for the first things will have passed away.