

## ***“The Healing Community”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia

Season of Pentecost, Sunday, October 20, 2013

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Holy Scriptures: Luke 17: 11-19 and 18: 1-8

*(Thank you, Fred Craddock and Buffy Calvert,  
for sharing your stories that are retold here. We are grateful.)*

### **The Healing Community**

Our own Fred Craddock tells a story of a Christian  
who went to see a friend in the hospital.

As the Christian visited with the patient,  
he offered to say a word of prayer.

He prayed to God for healing and mercy in this and every time of need,  
ending with the Lord’s Prayer.

No sooner was he done  
then the patient opened his eyes, sat straight up,  
and said, *“I feel better already!”*

He began to throw off the bed sheets and pull I.V. needles out of his arm.  
He walked to the closet and pulled out a change of clothes  
and hurriedly got dressed,  
saying all the while, *“I feel terrific! This is amazing!”*

Head held high and with pep in his step,

he proceeded to walk out the room and down the hall,

loudly praising God for healing him body and soul.

The Christian sat down heavily on the chair in the corner,

looked up and said,

*“God, don’t you ever do that to me again!”*

We put so much faith in medicines and medical wisdom, and well we should.

Do we also have faith in the mercy and grace of God to heal us, body and soul?

Our own Jesus of Nazareth tells a story of a person of faith

who went to the local judge to ask for justice.

The judge neither feared God nor was a respecter of people.

Yet the blessed widow returned time and again

to demand that justice be done,

so often, in fact, and with such persistence

that he relented, saying,

*“Even though I fear neither God nor any person,*

*I will grant her justice so that she will not wear me out*

*by continually coming.”*

Then Jesus adds a question to the parable:

Will not God, who loves you and wants to be in relationship with you and yours,

grant justice and mercy to those who call out to the Lord day and night?

Will God delay long in helping you and your plight, your need, your prayer?”

Who do you think called the Church into being to be the healing community?

Who inspired and empowered the first church to be hospitable,

to welcome in everyone,

and to minister unto the sick and the suffering,

the widows and orphans, the lost, the last and the least?

When Jesus finished the parable of the widow and the judge, he mused aloud,  
asking, “*When the Son of God returns, will he find faith on earth?*”

Will there be a healing community that welcomes and serves,  
believes and blesses in the holy name of Jesus?

Our own Buffy Calvert tells a story of a family of faith  
whose matriarch was named Quintina Ortiz.

Quintina Ortiz lived in the third floor apartment directly beneath ours.

I had to walk past her door on the third floor landing  
to get to the staircase to the fourth floor.

She had two Chihuahuas named Pebbles and Romeo. Don’t ask.

Whenever they heard approaching footsteps they yapped at the door,  
which Quintina would then open to see who was there.

Out the door they would scurry to attack my ankles.

So, in order to survive, every day after school I ran past her door.

Sometimes I made to safety, and sometimes not.

I still have the scars, a vivid, physical legacy of Pebbles and Romeo.

Quintina Ortiz taught Sunday School, served as the Church Treasurer,  
raised a fine family, made *arroz con pollo* for church meals,  
and modeled a living faith.

During the Great Depression there were days when all she had  
was a meager pot of thin soup to serve her husband and children.

While stirring she would fervently pray to Jesus Christ  
to stretch the soup and make it as sufficient as God’s grace.

As the soup’s steam rose and her tears of faith rolled down,  
the Holy Spirit mingled in the moisture and made itself known.

Tina said later that the Lord provided every night enough for their meal,  
and she gave thanks.

Quintina's son Luis grew up to marry Elsie,  
and they had three beautiful children.

Luis was a mechanic who worked at the city bus garage.

He repaired and maintained city buses,  
often working underneath them while their engines were still running.

Sad to say, he became ill with cancer.

During Luis Ortiz's illness he was taken to the OR for emergency surgery.

Afterward, in the Recovery Room

with his mother, Quintina, and his wife Elsie at his side,  
his heart stopped and he was whisked back to the OR.

Quintina and Elsie prayed fervently for his life.

Will not God, who loves you and wants to be in relationship with you and yours,  
grant justice and mercy to those who call out to the Lord day and night?

Luis said later that he saw a beautiful beckoning light  
and was going toward it  
when he (heard? felt?) being called to return.

His heart revived and he was returned to his mother and wife.

Mixed blessing here, folks.

On one hand, he awoke to find that he was back in a body wracked with pain.

On the other, Luis said he never feared dying after that.

Quintina wanted to show her thanks to God for his return to life.

At that time we had a spiritual group called The Healing Community

under the direction of the Rev. Peg Eddy.

Participants learned Biblical stories by heart

so they could use them with those in need,

concentrating on the healing stories in the Gospels.

At a service of thanksgiving arranged by Tina,

her sister Mercedes played the part of Jesus.

Mercedes told firsthand the Bible story of Jesus and the ten lepers.

Tina had recruited nine others to join her

in playing the part of a leper on the side of the road.

Worshippers watched as Jesus walked by on the way to Jerusalem,

and saw his encounter with the ten lepers.

They stood at a distance, a broken community in need of healing and wholeness.

They called out to him to have mercy and heal them.

As the story was acted out, they rushed toward Mercedes and received healing,

and then leapt and shouted, *"I'm healed!"*,

rejoicing as they returned to their seats in the sanctuary.

Buffy Calvert portrayed one of the lepers that day,

and she can still recall the electric feeling of gladness she felt.

All returned to their seats, to where they started from.

All except for one, that is.

Quintina went back to Jesus,

and knelt at Mercedes' feet saying "Thank you!"

One gave thanks, praising God and giving credit where credit is due.

Thank you for reviving my son.

Thank you for healing my soul.

Thank you for birthing and sustaining the healing community.

Thank you for the gifts of life and life after life.

Thank you for hearing our prayers,

our fervent, heartfelt, constant prayers for mercy and justice and hope.

After hearing the Gospel story the Christian stood up from the chair in the corner,

looked up and said, *“Go on, God, and do that again!”*

*All power be to the Creator, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen!*