

## ***“God’s Healing Community”***

Sermon for First Christian Church of Decatur, Georgia  
Season of Pentecost, Sunday, September 27, 2015  
James L. Brewer-Calvert, Senior Pastor

### **Holy Scriptures: James 5: 13-20 and Mark 9: 38-50**

James 5:13-20

Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective. Elijah was a human being like us, and he prayed fervently that it might not rain, and for three years and six months it did not rain on the earth. Then he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain and the earth yielded its harvest. My brothers and sisters, if anyone among you wanders from the truth and is brought back by another, you should know that whoever brings back a sinner from wandering will save the sinner's soul from death and will cover a multitude of sins.

Mark 9:38-50

John said to him, "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."

But Jesus said, "Do not stop him; for no one who does a deed of power in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. Whoever is not against us is for us. For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink because you bear the name of Christ will by no means lose the reward. If

any of you put a stumbling block before one of these little ones who believe in me, it would be better for you if a great millstone were hung around your neck and you were thrown into the sea. If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life maimed than to have two hands and to go to hell, to the unquenchable fire. And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off; it is better for you to enter life lame than to have two feet and to be thrown into hell. And if your eye causes you to stumble, tear it out; it is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and to be thrown into hell, where their worm never dies, and the fire is never quenched. For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good; but if salt has lost its saltiness, how can you season it? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

## **God's Healing Community**

Our own beloved Fred Craddock, who passed away earlier this year,

tells a story of a Christian who went to see a friend who was in the hospital.

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

She prayed to God for healing and mercy in this and every time of need,

ending with the Lord's Prayer.

No sooner was she 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, pulled out a change of clothes,  
hurriedly got dressed,  
all the while saying, *"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  
and into the city,  
loudly praising God for healing him body and  
soul.

The Christian sat down heavily on the chair in the corner.  
She 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?  
Do we have the faith to trust that God chooses  
to work and play and make whole  
in the whole people of God,  
thus empowering followers to become  
God's healing community?

Jesus of Nazareth told a parable about a person of faith – a  
widow --  
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 the judge 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?

Will not God hear the cries of the suffering,  
and call out to the Church of Jesus Christ to  
respond

as a living, breathing answer to prayers of  
the people?"

### ***God's Healing Community***

As James wrote in his Epistle:

*"The prayer of faith will save the sick,  
and the Lord will raise them up;  
and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven.  
Therefore confess your sins to one another,  
and pray for one another, so that you may be healed."*

Who do you think called the Church

– and the whole wide world that is in God's hands! –  
into being the Lord's 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?

Who do we know that taught us the intimate connection

between personal healing and communal justice,  
proclaiming that at the core of justice is mercy,  
and at the center of mercy  
is the compassion God instills

within us

to care for one another.

We cannot -- and must not -- and shall not

separate the personal healing we pray for in Jesus'  
name

from the opportunities God places before us  
to extend a cup of cool water to a thirsty  
soul,

especially to our neighbors

who lack access to clean

water and safe havens

and a peaceful life in the human condition.

If we ever get confused or disappointed or upset about who is  
on our side,

remember that we are not the first, and we won't be the  
last.

The first disciples got similarly upended,

and had to learn the hard way

that ministry and relationships and being a  
healing community

isn't about God being on our side –

it is about being on the side of God.

John the Disciple said to Jesus the Rabbi,

*"Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name,  
and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us."*

But Jesus said,

*"Do not stop him [nay, do not stop him! Encourage him!];*

*for no one who does a deed of power in my name*

*will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me.*

*Whoever is not against us is for us.*

*For truly I tell you, whoever gives you a cup of water to drink*

*because you bear the name of Christ  
will by no means lose the reward."*

### ***God's Healing Community***

Recently Nadia Bolz-Weber said to a group of clergy,  
*"Preach from your scars, not your wounds."*

Good advice, Nadia.

Folks, give your wounds time to heal

before you expound on the pain and the glory, the loss  
and the gain,

and what you may -- or may not -- have learned.

Speaking personally, my surgical wounds are scarred, sealed  
and smoothed over.

God is so good.

And so is Dr. Ian Katz!

Your daily prayers – emanating from Christ's healing  
community --

have played no small part in your pastor's curing and  
calling

into a resurrected life and revived joy.

On the May day of my surgery to remove a cancerous tumor,

I thought that I may not see dawn's early light.

I updated my last & will testament, signed a living will, and said  
I love you to everyone.

When I awoke in the recovery room six hours later,

I told an angel in blue, *"I am so glad to see you, and so  
glad to be alive!"*

Well, that night I told my daughter Katie to go home, that I  
would be fine.

She refused to leave, and curled up in a chair to keep watch.

Little did I know how often and how much and how badly

I needed her help and presence that night --  
and every one of the next five days and nights in  
the hospital.

The morning after the surgery

I knew from watching and visiting with parishioners  
over thirty years of pastoral ministry  
that if I got up and walked even a few  
steps

that I would heal faster and better.

Even though I felt like someone had punched me in the belly,

I moved slowly and carefully with a portable IV pole on  
one side

and Katie and a nurse on the other,

We made it in glacial speed to the nurses' station, and I told the  
staff on duty,

*"Good bye! I am going home now!"*

A nurse walked up behind me

and asked if I would like the backside of my hospital  
gown closed.

Another nurse said, *"The first look is free. After that they have  
to pay."*

On the third day our Regional Minister Denise Bell came

and prayed with passion and faith for God to remove  
the pain and make me well.

My friends, let me testify:

In the midst of Rev. Bell's prayer for healing  
most of the pain in my tummy evaporated and  
rose heavenward,

and rarely did I experience such  
discomfort again.

***God's Healing Community***

I have reflected on my daughter's dogged insistence  
that she stay and pray and play for 5, 6 days in the  
hospital,

and that she attend every one of my chemo  
treatments this summer

when she could have been doing  
whatever 20, 21 year olds do.

I have come to the conclusion that the best explanation  
is that Katie was raised in God's healing community.  
Because Katie was an active participant in Christ's church,  
she has been a living witness of what a healthy church  
does for each other and for the wider city and  
world.

Whether by hearing your stories,  
or her own active engagement in ministries of grace,  
or tagging along on pastoral calls with dear old  
dad,

or simply the gift of osmosis  
- gleaning grace by being in the  
presence of grace -

Katie represented.

I tell our story because this is one of many, many, many  
examples

of who we are and what we are about and what we  
share

on this corner of Nelson Ferry Road and Ponce  
De Leon Avenue.

The ripples of ***God's Healing Community*** spread far and wide.

Even as we speak a man of God



who was raised by this healing community  
is with 10 or 11 Dominican colleagues  
at the border of Haiti and the Dominican  
Republic.

Henry Brewer-Calvert represents our congregation  
and the wider church as a Global Ministries Intern.  
When he told his parents that he was going to the border of  
Haiti

I was immediately worried, concerned for his safety.  
Then when I learned what he was going to do there,  
I cried tears of joy.

This week Henry and his colleagues are with Haitian children  
who are orphans or destitute or in need of a balm of  
Gilead.

Our missionaries are side by side with the children, learning  
their names,  
singing, dancing, playing, teaching, feeding, loving,  
reading stories,  
and dispensing cups of cool water to God's gifts  
to the world.

They are paying attention to the lost, the last, and the least,  
the precious and playful and precocious.

Where do you think Henry discerned how to care, to be  
compassionate,  
to listen and learn and lead?

From Jesus of Nazareth.

From you.

From all of us.

From ***God's healing community.***

This week Pope Francis is teaching us a thing or two about  
being a healing community.

Pope Francis met with America's most powerful and influential

political leaders,

then stepped outside to listen to and bless homeless men and women.

He toured and spoke at our venerated, historic halls of liberty and freedom,

then went to a local jail to minister to the incarcerated. He spoke with passion about the disparity of resources between the rich and poor,

and he called us to do all we can to heal the earth and address climate change.

One does not have to be a Catholic to appreciate Pope Frances; or a Disciples of Christ to be grateful

for those from this church who are affirmed and empowered to serve;

or a Jew, a Gentile, a Christian, a Muslim, or an Agnostic

to recognize what it takes to be a faith community

that practices what it preaches:

hospitality, healing, and hope.

Jesus taught us the intimate connection

between personal healing and communal justice,

proclaiming that at the core of justice is mercy, and at the center of mercy

is the compassion God instills within us

to care for one another.

At the heart of our prayers for healing, for mercy, for justice is gratitude.

Gratitude.

Thanksgiving.

Eucharist.

*Thank you, God!*

*Thank you, Jesus!*

*Thank you, Holy Spirit!*

We gave thanks and give credit where credit is due.

*Thank you for reviving my relative.*

*Thank you for mending my soul.*

*Thank you for birthing and sustaining Your Church.*

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

*Thank you for answering our prayers,*

*our fervent, heartfelt, constant prayers for justice and mercy and help.*

Like the Christian woman in Fred Craddock's story, some might say,

*"God, don't you ever do that again!"*

However, we in God's healing community shout with joy:

*"Thank you, Jesus! Let's do that again!"*

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