

Sunday Morning Worship at Brentwood, May 29, 2016

Notes for the sermon on *The Power to Heal*

Ps 96:1-9 and Luke 7:1-10 – Sermon Text = Luke 7:7

***“... I did not presume to come to you.
But only speak the word,
and let my servant be healed.***

[Hymns = 286, 299, 300]

Key ideas = God has the power to heal – but how that happens, what the dynamics are, what flow of energies are involved, what faculties and influences are at work are a mystery – we see through a glass darkly – in this story from Luke, the centurion knows that healing in the hands of God – for all of its mystery, it lies in a relationship with God – in faith and trust in God’s wise care – not in our desperate desires for comfort in our physical bodies alone



Another friend died this week

David Grier and I met arguing whether bank loans to South Africa were a positive or negative influence in ending apartheid – he was a senior executive with the Royal Bank – I was chairing the Taskforce of the Churches and Corporate Responsibility – we enjoyed our disagreements so much we became fast friends – I did the wedding for he and Annette when they moved to Toronto – David’s health has been declining for years – his son, Jon, emailed me this week that he thought he was going “to dodge this bullet, just like he had so many in the past” – but he didn’t – my prayers went unanswered - key parts of his body broke down further and he passed on early Friday morning

Watching bodies break down and souls stay resilient

As I mentioned in our Memorize & Ponder this week, part of the Christian perspective on illness has to be a witness to the full picture of what a human being is – not just a body in which we try to understand, then manipulate, the physical dynamics – but an embodied soul in which everything is integrated by the loving breath of God – knowing full well that the body is temporary, fragile, subject to corrosive influences, all the time rusting out – but that a body cared for in a loving way can bear the soul through many years in this dimension of our lives

Resilience in our souls

In many ways, this story in Luke is more about faith than it is about healing – it's about the resilience in the centurion's soul that arises from his trust in God – part of Luke's purpose in telling this story is to emphasize that God's favour extends beyond the Jewish people – not to their exclusion, but to the inclusion of the Gentile world – but it can also be seen as a story to inspire the resilience of faith – this is the source from which true healing flows – the true healing of a closer relationship with God, others, and ourselves – it's a healing, hard as it is to comprehend and accept, that always includes death

Three aspects of resilience in our souls are particularly important as we face illness – **first**, stay in touch with your community of support – be accepting of their care, appreciative of their efforts, and forgiving of their fumbles - **second**, grow in the grace of your relationship with God – pay particular attention to the soulful dimensions of your life – **third**, grow in the confidence that you are on a journey 'home' – to the heaven that God is bringing to full fruition – where justice, spirituality, relationships, and beauty will all come to full fruition in what that wonderful Shaker hymn, Simple Gifts, calls "the valley of love and delight."

David wasn't a practicing Christian – he was intrigued by theology – he had studied world religions with Wilfred Cantwell Smith at McGill in Montreal – we always had fascinating conversations about the good and ill that religions brought to human kind – his resilience came from his compassion, his joy in relationships, and his appreciation for beauty (a keen photographer), and a glass a day of fine Barbados rum

My teachers in resilience in the face of illness in this congregation are many – but I was thinking particularly this week of May Bate and Chrissie Halverson – May with her enduring love of church music as a source of comfort and Chrissie with her rock solid conviction that God was with her and had a plan, no matter what was happening

How God heals remains a mystery to me – but *that* God heals is a reality I trust – even, perhaps especially, when it takes us through the valley of the shadow of death – even there, we need fear no evil