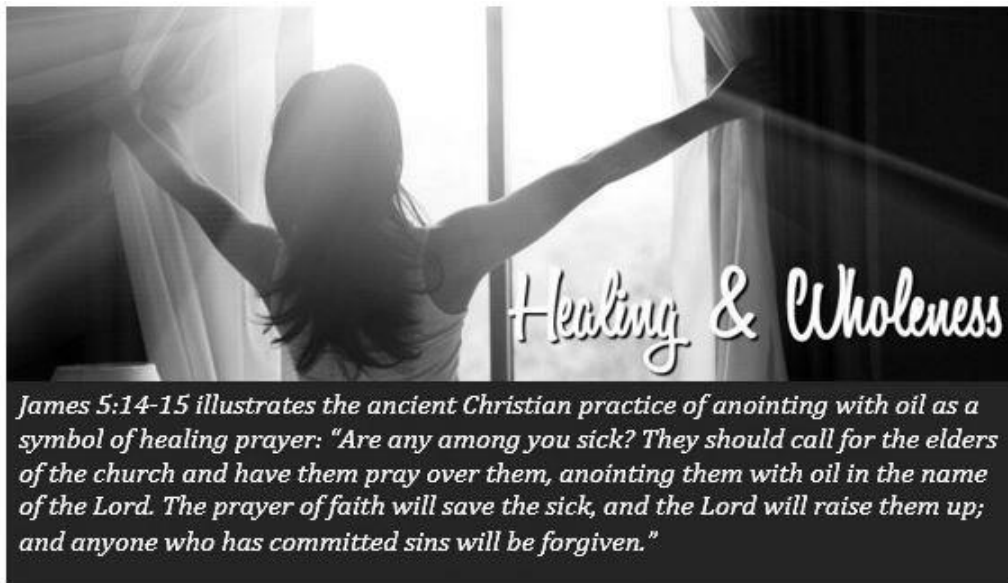


HEALING, WHOLENESS AND HOPE



Scripture:

Psalm 23

¹The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want. ²He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters;³he restores my soul. He leads me in right paths for his name's sake.

⁴Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for you are with me; your rod and your staff— they comfort me.

⁵You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies; you anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows. ⁶Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life, and I shall dwell in the house of the LORD my whole life long.

James 5:8-16

⁸You also must be patient. Strengthen your hearts, for the coming of the Lord is near. ⁹Beloved, do not grumble against one another, so that you may not be judged. See, the Judge is standing at the doors!

¹⁰As an example of suffering and patience, beloved, take the prophets who spoke in the name of the Lord. ¹¹Indeed we call blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.

¹²Above all, my beloved, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "Yes" be yes and your "No" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.

¹³Are any among you suffering? They should pray. Are any cheerful? They should sing songs of praise. ¹⁴Are 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. ¹⁵The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. ¹⁶Therefore 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.

This is the Word of the Lord! Thanks be to God!



HEALING, WHOLENESS AND HOPE

One of my favorite young Presbyterian theologians, Pastor Rachel Held Evans wrote this about the use of oil in the church for anointing. She says, "The ancients knew the healing properties of oils, which were applied to wounds and ingested as medicine. When James instructs the early church to anoint the sick with oil and to lay their hands on the sick and pray, the prescription is both practical and spiritually significant."

The journey through suffering is a holy journey, one the Messiah himself knew well. Healing may come through medicine, through prayer, through sacred presence, but always with God's holy grace and forgiveness.

A SPECIAL GRACE

The Universal Church defines the anointing of the sick as "the conferral of a special grace on the one experiencing difficulties inherent in the condition of life on earth such as grave illness and aging.

Even in death, the sick are anointed, reminded that the seal of the Holy Spirit is more permanent than the grave.

There is nothing magic about oil. It is merely a carrier of memory, of healing, of God's grace.

We anoint not to cure, but to heal. We anoint to soothe, to dignify, and even in our suffering, to remember the grace of God.

DR. ALFRED HEASTY

Anointing can also create space for a sacred gathering of the Christian community. An example was demonstrated in the life of Dr. Alfred Heasty, a medical missionary in Africa and a member of a Presbyterian congregation in the Midwest. When his wife talked about her husband, she often said, "When I married

Alfred I thought since I was marrying a doctor he would have to work long hours, but I had no idea I was marrying a missionary too, and I also would be working long hours with him!"

They lived in primitive conditions, but Mrs. Heasty found ways to be happy. She said, "One of the few luxuries I had were my Cool Whip containers." Can you imagine Cool Whip containers being a luxury?

She said, "We used them in Africa to store our food, because they kept the bugs and rodents out of our home. The bugs were about the size of mice and the mice were about the size of cats."

Mrs. Heasty remembered when one day her husband came home for lunch and apparently on his walk home he saw some prisoners eating their meal off the ground. The men guarding the prisoners just poured their food on the sandy soil and the prisoners ate their meal mixed with sand and the dirt and the bugs.

She said, "My Alfred saw that and came home and told me about it; and then he announced that he had arranged to give the guards medical care if they promised to give the prisoners their food on a dish. And they agreed." She said, "My husband asked me to gather all my Cool Whip containers."

"My Cool Whip containers!" What are you thinking, Alfred? What are we going to do? Have bugs in our food?"

She said, "Alfred just looked at me and said, 'What are you afraid of?'"

"I'm afraid this is part of the good news of the Gospel, Alfred."

And he said, "So am I, but isn't it wonderful?"

ANOINTING

This same Dr. Heasty and his wife retired from the mission field and became neighbors of the pastor of their church. Pastor Donovan remembered one afternoon he heard a knock on his door and there was Alfred. He told him that he was dying and wanted Pastor Donovan to get the elders together to anoint his head with oil and pray over him.

Rev. Donovan said, "Alfred, I don't think we do that; we're Presbyterian."

"Yes we do! It's in our Book of Order and, more importantly, it's in the Bible," said Alfred.

After being assured that anointing with oil was in the Book of Order, the elders gathered and laid hands on Dr. Heasty, anointing his head with oil, and saying the most beautiful prayers for healing.

Dr. Heasty died later on that year. But now looking back, Pastor Donovan reflects on the day of his anointing and says that preventing his death wasn't the purpose of our gathering. "The purpose of the oil and the prayers and the community was to find themselves gathered up in the kind of grace that takes up all our fears for the future and makes them sit down in the heavenly places."

HEALING DOESN'T MEAN CURE

There are many of kinds of healing but the word healing doesn't mean cure. Healing means the process of becoming sound or feeling healthy again....or whole.

Cure is defined as: to relieve (a person or animal) of the symptoms of a disease or condition. Cure is disease oriented. Healing is wholeness oriented.

When we say, "May you be healed in body, mind, and spirit," we are praying for God's will to be done. We can not claim to cure an illness with anointing with oil and prayer, but we offer a sense of God's healing grace and forgiving love. I believe in miracles, and I also believe that healing can come in many forms. If you are spiritually healed but the illness remains, we know a strong spirit is beneficial for coping with suffering and pain.

SUFFERING

When suffering is accepted and embraced, there is a new perspective on life that can lead to a new relationship with God. That is the foundation of the book of Job. His suffering challenged his relationship with God and made it deeper in the end. Accepting that all lives experience some form of suffering can be a path to peace between people, too.

When we are humbled by sickness or pain from losses, we may learn to appreciate the little things in life, like an hour without pain, or a day without rain, or time spent with family and friends.

**What we focus on we become.
If you focus on the suffering it
becomes your life.
There is a famous saying that says,
"In this life pain is inevitable
but suffering is optional."**

WE BELONG TO GOD

In life and in death we belong to God. God is with us in the midst of the pain and in the midst of the joys. Pain serves an important purpose and can be seen as a gift when it is protective. It tells us there is something wrong that needs to be corrected.

Pain can help us create human connections with people who understand. For example, Post Traumatic Stress pain that results from being a soldier in the war connects veterans with others. I believe pain and suffering connects us to each other and to God on a deeper level than joy and happiness. But they are all potential connectors.

Being in support groups such as church groups boosts your immune system and helps fight off illness. We are created to connect. That is why the elders were told in James 5 to go as a group and pray over the person who was sick. James 5 also says: "We must be patient and strengthen our hearts for the Lord is near." Such good advice for dealing with suffering! Patience, resilience, and an awareness of the nearness of God is a good formula for healing and wholeness.

The reassurance in James 5, that God is compassionate and merciful is helpful, too. Many people imagine that when they are sick it is a punishment from God. The Jewish tradition used to teach that when you were ill it was because you were not being blessed by God. Others believed only the sinful suffer. That is

why Jesus always reassured those he healed that they were forgiven.

BE HONEST AND AUTHENTIC

The other prescription from James is to be honest and authentic in your way of being. He said, "Let your yes be yes and your no be no," none of this wishy-washy way of being in the world. Be truthful, authentic and honest and you will be healthier in body, mind and spirit.

PARISH NURSING

Churches were created from the beginning to be places that promoted healing and wholeness. When Granger Westburg, started Parish Nursing he was a chaplain at a medical center. He believed that true healing involves the body, mind and spirit, all inter-connected. And he thought nurses were the best health care professionals to make that connection for people in the church and community.

DEACONS BUDDY PROGRAM

Deacons also play an important role in the church as they keep people connected through our Deacon Buddy program. Helping people not feel alone in the world is a huge gift to their spiritual and physical health and wellbeing.

STEPHEN MINISTERS

Stephen Ministers are also equipped to provide emotional and spiritual support during difficult times. Dr. Kenneth Haug who started Stephen Ministry was a psychologist first and then a pastor. He recruited men and women who were willing to go through extensive training on how to listen without offering unwanted advice. Our Stephen Ministers are ready to listen patiently, without judging, as you go through loss, grief, or other stressful changes in your lives.

Stephen Ministers are trained to be caring Christian friends who can help hurting individuals sort out options and resources over time as they heal. They do not give advice or provide solutions but they will walk along side you, pray with you and provide a confidential listening ear.

ANOINTING WITH OIL

I've asked Chris Rhodes, commissioned elder, to join me in the anointing with oil. The Stephen Ministers will now go to the three prayer stations they have set up to hear prayer requests and pray briefly with you.

Please come forward, if you are able, for anointing, or go straight to a prayer station for prayer, or feel free to just sit and sing or pray silently at your seat. Raise your hand if you want us to come to you.

Benediction:

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you now and forever more. Amen



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