

Luke 13:10-17 St. Augustine's, Aug 25, 2013 **Jesus on the look-out**

Despite the fact I stand before you with my arm in a sling – the obvious sign that the healing of my fractured arm is not yet complete – the core of my faith is trust in God's healing work in my life. **Jesus has been looking out** for my healing ever since our dog flung me to the ground when he decided to chase the big brown UPS truck in our driveway.

Actually, **Jesus has been on the look-out** for my healing all my life. I just didn't know it. I didn't really begin to know it till one day 36 years ago when I was jogging on a country road in Columbia, Missouri. I had just become the stepmother of Bob's two daughters, ages 14 and 15. Try that sometime to help you get in touch with your inadequacy. I cried out to God that day, demanding help now, not when I died. I wasn't looking for a pie in the sky in the sweet bye and bye kind of faith. I was looking for a real God, with real practical answers, and tangible help to get me through the challenges I was facing. Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God. I knew I was poor that day. **Jesus had been on the look-out** for that day to finally come for me. Something in me was healed, something was put right, enough to keep me going and growing in trusting God.

Healing is one of the signs of the Kingdom of God. Ever since that day in the synagogue in Nazareth when Jesus read from the Isaiah scroll and said, "Today this scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing," **Jesus has been on the look-out** - for people who need healing and release from captivity and the hope of freedom.

Jesus was on the look-out on another Sabbath when he saw a man with a withered hand, who, btw, didn't ask to be healed. Jesus just observed the man's affliction, because it is characteristic of **Jesus to be on the look-out** for things that need to be put right. So Jesus healed the man's withered hand without being asked, out of compassion for the man because that's part of what the Kingdom of God on earth is about. Relieving suffering and giving hope are signs that God really is present, really does rule – and those with the eyes of faith rejoice when they see it.

Jesus was on the look-out on another Sabbath, in another synagogue, when he healed a woman who had been bent over for 18 years. So bent over that she'd been unable to look anywhere but down for nearly 2 decades! Whether you interpret the woman's ailment as physical, or take her being bent over more metaphorically as someone who had been so victimized or abused or oppressed in some way that she had not the strength of a back bone to stand up straight and face her life – either interpretation works for helping us see her suffering and Jesus' response of compassion. **Jesus was on the look-out.** Without being asked, Jesus healed her. She

stood up straight for the first time in 18 years and began praising God. Her healing was a sign of God's ruling presence in their midst, and the people who saw it "rejoiced at all the wonderful things Jesus was doing." (Luke 13.17)

Remember last week's sermon? Fletcher told us that the definition of peace is more than the absence of conflict, that peace really refers to shalom- the complete harmony of well-being with oneself, with others, and with God, with all the potential that holds. As with the word peace, there is much more to the definition of healing than merely the absence of disease or affliction. When the Bible refers to Jesus healing someone, he is doing something far more than curing them of their diseases. Jesus goes deeper, to their very souls to put right things that break us and sicken us, the things that disfigure and destroy and deaden our lives. Jesus' kind of healing restores us to the wholeness of the image of God that we are created to be. So Jesus' healing is a sign of the Kingdom of God that anticipates the complete healing and wholeness that awaits us on the other side of death. Our physical death is the doorway into our resurrection to an eternal wholeness.

I have had the privilege of watching Jesus healing people, especially during 7 years of ministry as a staff chaplain at St. Luke's Episcopal Hospital in Houston, TX. It was during those years of hospital ministry that my habit of praying with my eyes open that allowed me to see some wondrous things- some miraculous healing and resurrection events.

One of those events was when a patient named Jim took a turn for the worse a few days after surgery and had to have a breathing tube reinserted so he could be put back on a ventilator. Before his surgery he and his wife had discussed just such a possibility and they were clear that being sustained by a ventilator or dialysis was not what he wanted. The day after he was put back on the ventilator, when sedation was lifted to check his neurological status, Jim clearly mouthed the word “No” to his nurse, who asked the wife what she thought that meant. The wife was certain her husband was saying, “No, I don’t want this... Ventilator and breathing tube.” When the doctors wanted to begin dialysis the wife refused, and after a 24 hour wait to see if there was any improvement, she insisted it was her husband’s wish to be allowed to die.

We gathered around Jim’s bed, the wife and a couple from their Baptist church in Florida who had come with them to Houston for support. The ventilator and the drugs that maintained Jim’s blood pressure were turned off. Jim’s wife was on one side with the woman of the couple (friends), and the man of the couple (friends) was on the other side of the bed. He prayed one of the most beautiful prayers of commendation I have ever heard. From my place at the foot of the bed I saw all their heads bowed and eyes closed, as I watched the monitor record a slowing heart pattern and falling blood pressure of 40/20. It suddenly occurred to me to sing an old hymn I knew to be a favorite of Baptists.

“When peace like a river attendeth my way, when sorrows like sea billows roll....” Before I had finished the first phrase, the others joined in, singing in four part harmony. Their eyes remained closed, so they did not see the amazing sight I saw: As soon as I began to sing, Jim began to nod up and down, saying “yes.” Not just once or twice, but many times, he nodded a definite, “Yes.”

We finished the 1st verse: “Whatever my lot, thou hast taught me to say, It is well, it is well with my soul. It is well with my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul.” I couldn’t figure out how to alert the others to see what I was seeing without disrupting the holiness of the moment. Jim had joined our song with his sign of agreement. We all remained silent, and after a minute, I decided to sing the last verse of the hymn, so I began: “Oh Lord, haste the day when the faith shall be sight. The clouds be rolled back as a scroll.” Again, the others joined in the singing, and once again, with the monitor now showing a blood pressure of 20/0, Jim began to nod his definite “Yes.” “The trump shall resound and the Lord shall descend, even so, it is well with my soul. It is well, with my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul.” As Jim came to the end of his journey, he communicated with the living the only way he could, saying he was at peace, he was healed, that all was well with his soul. In that holy moment of Jim’s passing from this life to the next, I got to see on earth as it is in heaven.

In this day of continuous bad news, we desperately need to see the signs of God’s kingdom on earth as it is in heaven. It needn’t be as dramatic as at the bedside of someone dying. **Jesus continues to be on the look-out.** And Jesus wants us to be on the look-out with him. We need our own experiences of healing, whether it is physical, psychological, spiritual, emotional, relational – even if it is some small part of our lives put right, for every part of us that is transformed and remade into the image of God is a little resurrection. When we experience the cleansing and healing power of forgiveness, we get a glimpse of God’s kingdom where all are forgiven. We need to be on the look-out to see Jesus’ kind of healing hospitality extended to strangers, for that anticipates the day in God’s kingdom when there will be no strangers. We can see God’s kingdom when we share what we have with those who suffer want, for that anticipates the day when there will be no more hunger, pain, sorrow, or fear. (paraphrased from Diana Butler Bass, *Christianity after Religion, The End of Church and the Birth of a new Spiritual Awakening*. New York: Harper Collins, 2012, 158)

When you and I can see these signs of the Kingdom of God, whatever else we see in our world, we can say, “It is well with my soul, it is well, it is well with my soul.”

The Rev. Mary Green