

**PARK HILL UNITED METHODIST CHURCH
FIFTH SUNDAY AFTER EPIPHANY
REV. JOHN L. THOMPSON
“WHEN BAD THINGS HAPPEN TO GOOD
PEOPLE”
February 8, 2009
Mark 1:29-39
8:45 A.M. Service**

Job is the classic example of “**when bad things happen to good people.**” He suffered human tragedies of every kind. He refused to believe the glib religious explanations of his friends, but endured in what he believed was the truth.

Jesus personifies faith for the whole person. He cared about bodies and minds as much as hearts and souls. There was a sense of restlessness in him that would not let him rest as long as others were in any need whatsoever.

In the first chapter of the Gospel of Mark we see that Jesus was an extraordinary teacher. The people said he taught “*as one having authority.*” But according to the scriptures, he was a healer, also. In Capernaum, for instance, on the Sabbath, Jesus healed a demon-possessed man in the synagogue. Later that same day he went to the home of Simon and Andrew where he healed Simon’s mother-in-law. Later that evening the people of Capernaum brought to Jesus all who were sick or demon-possessed. After a long night of ministering to these, Jesus went to a deserted place to pray. But the disciples found him and said, “*Everyone is searching for you.*” Of course! Who wouldn’t? But in our time, what are we to make of Jesus the healer?

Let us remember, that in biblical times physical afflictions and diseases were explained in one of two ways. Generally they were believed to be a punishment for sin. Job’s “*friends*” take this position with regard to his suffering. It was also believed, however, that demons entered even good people and took control of them. Our modern understanding of

psychosomatic illness demonstrates that negative emotions such as guilt can indeed affect a person's health. But this is hardly the same as believing that all sickness is caused by sin. Our scientific culture finds mental illness causing some of the same phenomena that characterized demon possession in Jesus' world. However we account for these differences between biblical times and today, Jesus was clearly effective in healing diseases of both the body and the mind.

Let's not forget, that even we, of the twenty-first century sometimes have naïve and overly-simplistic understandings of sickness and health. Going to the doctor is often thought to be like taking a car to a mechanic. Something is wrong, perhaps broken, and we want it fixed. Surely a capsule or an injection will correct whatever is wrong with us. Often this is the case; but we are not automobiles. We are complex and multi-faceted creatures. Sometimes we think we need a pill, when what we really need is a reordering of our priorities or a moment of honesty about our fear. Healing involves more than fixing broken parts. Just because we have a Black President doesn't mean that we have fixed all that's wrong with Black America, or the whole of America.

From the beginning to the end, the biblical view of things is that there is a connection between sickness and sin, therefore, between healing and salvation. For example, Isaiah calls Israel a "*sinful nation,*" a "*people laden with iniquity.*" They have "*forsaken the Lord*" and are "*utterly estranged.*" Therefore, says Isaiah, "*the whole head is sick, and the whole heart faint.*" All the "*bruises and sores and bleeding wounds*" have not been healed. (Is 1:4-6) As we've said, this is not to say that all suffering is caused by sin. Both Job and Jesus rejected such a view, as we must. But genuine healing inevitably involves the whole person - - body and soul, the physical and the spiritual. The Bible has a holistic view of the human being. It makes no sharp distinctions between the body and the soul, but sees the whole person in what we would call a psychosomatic unity. In this regard Biblical writers were ahead of their time, anticipating the insights of modern medicine, namely, that the whole person must be treated if complete healing is to occur.

While Jesus did not view illness as a direct punishment for sin, he did see his healing power as related to his power to forgive sin. As the Messiah, Jesus was the bringer of "**health and salvation.**" Just as his power over demons demonstrated his conquest of Satan, his power over sickness

demonstrated his conquest of sin. It is obvious from the words of Jesus that he saw a connection between his healing ministry and his redemptive mission. Listen to what he says in Mark 2:17; ***“They that are whole have no need of a physician, but they that are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.”***

It is important to note that the Apostolic Church preserved this sense of connection between salvation and healing. Church history seems to suggest that there may have been an order of ***“healers”*** in the New Testament Church. ***“Gifts of healing”*** are mentioned twice in 1 Corinthians 12 as gifts of the Spirit. However this connection between healing and salvation might be interpreted, the connection itself has remained strong in Christian history. It can be argued that the success of Christianity as a missionary religion in the ancient world, and the achievements of medical missions in the modern world, are doubtless due to the proclamation of Christ as the Savior-Healer of the world.

“Healing” and **“salvation”** in some languages are the same word. I don’t think Jesus would have had a problem with that. This is not to say, of course, that healing and salvation is literally the same thing. But each word helps define or interpret the other. Healing is always salvation, in that health, or life, is saved and not lost. And salvation, even in its most spiritual meaning, is a healing. We are restored to the oneness with God and with other people for whom we were made. When the estranged and alienated person is made whole by the grace of God, that’s healing! You may recall Flannery O’Connor; she found there would be no healing of her lupus, but she said there is grace whether healing comes or not.

The wholeness we are offered in Jesus Christ is not the absence of pain and suffering. It is the triumph of life over all forms of death, often through the experience of suffering. It was through the power of suffering love that Jesus endured the cross. Now he bids us take up our crosses and follow him. This simply cannot be understood as an invitation to longevity, peace, and prosperity. But it is an invitation to the quality of life known by those who find something to live for that is worth dying for. Call it salvation or healing, it is the life for which we were born.

Which is more powerful, physical strength or spiritual strength? Despite his speech impediment, Moses confounded the mighty Pharaoh. Despite his

size and youthfulness, David felled the giant Goliath. A small, frail Gandhi broke the back of the British Empire. A vulnerable and outnumbered Martin Luther King, Jr. inspired a revolution that continues to transform society. Appearances to the contrary, spiritual strength is vastly more powerful than physical strength. This year's Black History Month is different from any other in the history of our country; the difference is because of President Barack Obama!

One writer penned these words, **“Jesus had no servants, yet they called Him Master. He had no degree, yet they called Him Teacher. He had no medicines, yet they called Him Healer. He had no army, yet kings feared Him. He won no military battles, yet He conquered the world. He committed no crime, yet they crucified Him. He was buried in a tomb, yet He lives today.”**

Come! Grow your spirit with us. We invite you to anchor your spirituality in a place where you can continue to become spiritually healthy. To that end, I would love to be your pastor. I would love for this to be your church.