

Cross Keys United Methodist Church

2017 Lenten Devotional

Week 1

Ash Wednesday, March 1

Genesis 2:18-22

*...and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and then closed up the place with flesh.
Genesis 2:21b*

As we consider the topic of healing during the 40 week-days of our Lenten journey, let's keep in mind the true completeness that is found through faith in Jesus Christ. If you are like me, we tend to think of healing as something that happens to us physically. Healing is often physical yet in a broader sense healing is all about wholeness or completeness. We see both kinds of healing in our reading today.

First, Adam is physically healed when God closes up the place (Genesis 2:21) where God had previously taken a rib for the formation of the first woman. Second, Adam is made more complete when God brings to him a "suitable helper" (2:20). The original Hebrew word for the phrase *suitable helper* can be translated literally, "a help as opposite." The idea is that together, each with their corresponding parts, the man and the woman are given the gift of completeness.

I will never forget Maryann! She was too young to die—a beautiful person inside and out with an effervescent spirit that encouraged everyone within range of her glow. Yet, there she lay in a hospital bed with one week to live. Her once healthy body now only a shell of what it was in days gone by. I felt sorry for Maryann—why this for such a beautiful person? I felt sad—she suffered as her physical life ebbed away. I felt helpless—could anything I say make a difference? Yet, the sight of tubes and monitors or a withering body could not diminish the

supernatural peace that radiated from Maryann's face.

In a fallen world, her body was dying but in Christ her spirit was as alive and as effervescent as ever before! The medical staff, family members, church friends and clergy who entered her room left, not with sadness, but filled with joy. With such a joy in mind, one might say that when Maryann died she was not healed... and she was healed! From the world's point of view Maryann died of cancer, she was not healed. From the point of view of a Christ-follower, Maryann was healed or made complete at the very moment that she accepted Jesus Christ into her heart. In Christ Maryann wasn't dying. Like a caterpillar, she knew she was leaving her tired body behind only to sprout her new wings for the glorious flight to eternity!

God's perfect desire is that you will be complete despite a difficult childhood, despite any physical suffering that you are now enduring or despite any present or future worry, burden or concern. Our Sovereign and majestic God always has the power to heal. Sometimes, in His perfect will, God will supersede the ills and diseases of a fallen natural world. Yet, ultimately, like Maryann, our true completeness is found in Jesus Christ—an eternal completeness that can never be bound by a worldly body, by a temporal timeline, or by how we feel from one day to the next. God brought the gift of completeness to Adam and he accepted it. May our Lenten journey be all about drawing closer to God and accepting God's amazing gift of completeness.

Grace and Peace, Pastor Jeff

Thursday, March 2

Exodus 30:23-25, 29

In this way you will dedicate them for their holy purpose. Then they will be most holy, and anything that touches them will become holy. Exodus 30:29

Before God sent us Jesus, our redeemer and savior, there was no other way to publicly identify those things and people that were considered holy, or set apart in a Godly or Spiritual sense. There were only the commandments and the associated mosaic laws to keep us pure. A part of the law deals with rituals, celebrations, holy days, and specific practices. This verse is one of those specific practices that was called out to purify things and people for certain times and celebrations; for divine appointment. This is meant to signify a detailed, unique, single-purposed work that must be performed to produce an oil, by which things can be purified for their signified purpose.

We have seen this spread in many ways and places in our society, most times taken out of context. Let me give you some examples. What family recipe do you remember grandmother sharing with the family? How about Snake oil, or the infamous cough elixir of the old west, or perhaps a poultice of some sort to smear on your chest. What crazy things have you heard? These were all intended to cure your ills, or put another way, to purify your health so you could go on with your repaired lives. Perhaps you no longer believe in these old and outdated concoctions. You may have moved on to some other form of purification. Maybe you subscribe to some practice instead. Here, let's look at some of those. Do you bleed yourself to remove illness like in the dark ages? No, perhaps you believe that repetitive chants or penitence can bring about healing or make you "holy". Some people even do things and say things as a

front to appear holy. These are the things that a worldly society will distract you with. But, in general, and at best, they only support the natural chemistry of your body, or signify your intent to try to be, or appear to be "a nice person". These things are not spiritual at all.

With our Lord and Savior in heaven with God, we have been provided a new helper in the Holy Spirit, who resides in the hearts of all disciples of Jesus. The Spirit guides and directs us in the truth and will of God. This is how we are now made holy, spiritually holy. The anointing in our current day is done as a symbolic gesture of our acknowledgement of God, our acceptance of Jesus, and our desire and humility to be led by the Holy Spirit. Now, the purpose of the anointing is to signify our intent to be true disciples and to be efficient with all of God's grace. **Let the Holy Spirit touch you and make you holy!**

Jerry Furniss

Friday, March 3

Exodus 15:22-26

Then Moses cried out to the Lord, and the Lord showed him a piece of wood. He threw it into the water, and the water became fit to drink. Exodus 15:25a

The people of Israel had just been rescued from the Egyptians in a spectacular fashion. One that Hollywood has tried many times to depict with varying degrees of success. However, I can only imagine the reality was beyond understanding. The Israelites did not even get their feet wet, yet the Egyptians were swallowed by the waves and drowned.

But here we are a mere three days later and the people are already grumbling. After three days without water they were thirsty, but when they finally came upon a source of

water it was not potable. So the people complained to Moses. Where was their faith? They had been saved from slavery by miraculous means yet they could not trust God for water?

Moses went to the Lord for relief. God provided a means by which the water was made palatable. God promises “to not bring on you any of the diseases I brought on the Egyptians” if the Israelites will but listen and obey.

We will often face adversity in our lives. They may last for long periods of time or for but a moment—but the Lord will deliver His people. Don’t grumble to Moses; take your worries to the Lord. His promises are true. He is the Lord, who heals you.

Julie Guenther

Saturday, March 4 Psalm 147

*He heals the brokenhearted
and binds up their wounds. Psalm 147:3*

Most people, at some time in their lives, have stood in the middle of an emotional storm. Emotions like sadness and anger sometimes wash over and the dams break and floods are overwhelming. Sometimes brave fronts are constructed and Christians try to stand strong in the face of the storm. The hospital room, the courtroom, the empty home, the empty arms become a battlefield where emotions are fought, and sometimes hidden.

The powerful praise psalm, Psalm 147, does not encourage us to hide our emotions from God. Just the opposite, it shares the image of a broken Jerusalem out in the open for all to see. The psalmist says that the Lord built it up, He restored Jerusalem and then called the

exiles home. Note he does not say the exiles rebuilt the city. God did. Just like He created the stars in the heavens, and then called them by name. The character of God is great and powerful and a mighty Creator and He calls the brokenhearted by name.

He will heal the brokenhearted and bind their wounds. Today, sometimes healing can be done remotely. We have all seen the advances that make it possible. But binding a wound is a different story. To bind a wound requires someone to be present, to use their own hands, to touch you. It is the binding that takes the healing to the most personal level. It is the binding that holds you together in the middle of the storm.

As we enter this season of Lent, maybe you have hurts you have been hiding. Maybe you are standing strong against a storm of sadness, anger or fear that distracts you from your relationship with God. While we wait for the coming of Easter, ask God to heal your broken heart. Know that He is present and His touch will bind your wounds, and He will bless you and keep you in Christ Jesus.

Darlene Schoenewald