

Fifth Sunday After Epiphany, February 8, 2015, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: Mark 1:29-39

“Compassionate Healer”

"The whole town gathered at the door," "and Jesus healed many who had various diseases. He also drove out many demons." (Mark 1:33-34)

The New Testament is rich with the compassion of Our Lord, Jesus Christ –which is indeed part of the character of Almighty God. We are given example after example of Jesus, God's Word Incarnate – healing the illness and brokenness of those who come to Him, for example – Jesus' healing of Peter's mother in law, in Capernaum. Jesus is a remarkable example - showing to us a real compassion for the needs of others – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. How often it is that we only think of healing as the physical – asking for God to heal some illness, some pain, and or some disease that has taken on either ourselves or the ones we love. Today – I believe that we need to look at the promises of Jesus Christ – how awesome it was that our opening hymn just happened to be “Standing on the Promises of God - and how - when we let Him – when we give Him permission is our lives - He can heal our pains and tortures – physically, emotionally, and spiritually. I have got to tell you today – that it is only in Jesus Christ – the compassionate healer – that we can be made whole – and experience true inner healing!

In the Galilee region, where Jesus carried out much of His ministry - Capernaum is a town where many people came to Jesus for healing. The Gospels tell us that these people were big on need – lining up by the droves to be healed - but they were apparently quite short on repentance and faith. In fact, Jesus warns Capernaum about that very fact: *“And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You will descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it will be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the Day of Judgment, than for you.”* (Matthew 11:23-24)

As we know Jesus spent quite a bit of His time ministering to lepers, (people with skin diseases) and others who were considered by others as sinful, unclean, and outcasts of society. Lepers, by the Law, had to announce themselves to those around them by shouting “Unclean” when anyone was nearby. Can you just imagine the emotional scars – probably even greater than the physical scarring and loss of limbs? Those who were considered unclean lived in total abandonment, rejection, hatred, anger, mockery, and abuse. Jesus reached out to these who were unclean – but more importantly Jesus touched and confirmed their faith and their importance in the eyes of God – and then restored them to a right place in society by instructing them to go to the priest so that their restoration could be certified. In Luke chapter 17 – Jesus healed ten lepers – but sadly only one returns to Jesus to give glory to God. Jesus asks those people who were present where the other nine are – but then turns to the now healed Samaritan and says: *“Stand up and go; your faith has made you well.”* (Luke 17:19)

Another time Jesus was on the way to bring Jairus' daughter back to life when He was stopped by the woman who had been bleeding for twelve years. This poor woman had endured suffering

with hemorrhaging, spending all that she had on doctors, living in the despair and the emotional trauma of uncleanness as well as the isolation, anger, rejection and shame that went along with it – yet somehow she knew that if she could only touch the hem of Jesus’ garment that her life would change. She did touch His garment – and sure enough her bleeding instantly stopped. Mark’s Gospel says “*The woman fearing and trembling, aware of what had happened to her, came and fell down before Him and told Him the whole truth. And He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace and be healed of your affliction."* (Mark 5:33-34) What important and powerful words! Jesus compassionately and selflessly stopped what He was doing, and the mission that He was on for Jairus’ daughter, to speak with this woman. Jesus compassionately listened to her story, He didn’t cut her off and say – listen I have got to go somewhere – no He listened to her telling Him the “whole truth.” Jesus listened – giving her His undivided attention. He had already given her His power and healing, but He didn’t rush off –and instead He heard the depth of her faith and then He told her that **it was her faith that healed her!**

God Almighty is merciful to those who believe. Jesus commanded her to “*go in peace.*” Jesus gave her His “Shalom,” His peace. Jesus restored her to society, breaking those bonds of isolation, financial worry, despair, shame and hopelessness. Jesus told her to “*Go in peace and be healed of your affliction.*” True shalom, true peace is restoration of health, restoration of mind, and restoration of spirit – and it can only come from God Himself – in the person of Jesus Christ - *Yeshua Ha Mashiach*, the compassionate healer.

Please listen to these words from Psalm 145: “*The LORD is gracious and merciful; Slow to anger and great in loving kindness. The LORD is good to all, and His mercies are over all His works.*” (Psalm 145:8-9) **To have compassion is to love tenderly, to pity, to show mercy, to be full of eager yearning.** It is important that our own faith is in such a way that it does not doubt or ignore Christ’s love and compassion. How often have we read of or heard people say that there are no miracles, or that there is no need for miracles today? There are some who think that miracles are somehow a sign or proof of Christ’s deity, His divinity – never stopping to think that miracles and healing are the full and perfect expression of His compassion and love! We see evidence throughout the Scriptures of Jesus’ healing people purely because of His compassion. We see examples right here today – in His church of the many healings and deliverances from cancer and other ailments – purely because of His compassion, His love, – and a great deal of faith.

Let me share with you my personal story. In 1999 – I was suffering from constant, severe pain in my right leg. There was no sitting position that was comfortable for me for more than a minute or two or I would be hit with searing pain. I had virtually lost the use of my leg after my right hip replacement two years earlier. I had undergone several procedures to try to freeze the nerves, and had reached my limit of seven for that year for nerve blocks – and it still was only June! I was told “no more” we could not exceed that number. We were blessed to go on a unique intergenerational trip to Israel, with our church, Redeemer, in Jacksonville, Florida. I was limited in my exploration due to my leg – and I missed going to the top of Megiddo –

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because I could not climb the stairs, and part of that was going down to the cistern where water had been stored (and where my son found an ancient jug handle) I was staying on the bus - while Marilyn, John and Theresa climbed to the top to see the Jezreel Valley, and then down the steep staircase into the ancient cistern, which collected the city's water. A few days later, on June 21 in the evening, we were at Magaan Holiday Village, on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, singing praise songs and sharing some tales of our travels and what we had seen and experienced or learned or seen on this trip. One of the men, named Will, stood up and said "there is someone here tonight who is in need of our prayer, and we need to lay hands on him." He walked right over to me and put his hands on my shoulders - and quickly so did everyone else - praying for God's mercy and healing. I remember feeling such incredible love and caring - and I was overcome with a sense of great faith that I proclaimed "tomorrow I was going to be healed!" How could I possibly have known that? God put it on my heart and with boldness I spoke those words. I remember thinking to myself - "what did I just say? What happens if it doesn't happen?"

That next day - June 22, we left that Kibbutz where we stayed and headed south along the Jordan River. Some young people on the trip were going to be baptized and Fr. Neil (now our bishop) offered to assist anyone who wanted to "reaffirm" or "rededicate" their baptismal vows in the Jordan. Marilyn and I gladly volunteered. We excitedly donned the white gowns and headed to Yardenit - a traditional baptismal site. Marilyn went first and Fr. Neil and I assisted her submersion. I was next. I went back and under the water - coming up to a sensation of everyone and everything being bathed in the most incredible bright white light. It was so bright and I kept telling everyone that. Next - I felt a sudden burning in my right thigh, followed by numbness, and then a remarkable sensation absence of any pain! It was - and still is gone to this day! I can remember being able to run up the steps out of the Jordan - grateful for what Jesus had just done - and fully aware that it was Him who had delivered me from that constant torture of pain. He had given me the gift of faith to expect a miracle! **You need to have faith to expect a healing in order to receive a healing.** What took place on the shore of the Sea of Galilee when He gave me the feeling, the sensation, the knowledge that I would be healed; to proclaim it out loud - He took care of. Jesus told us the exact conditions that He requires for us to receive any blessing that He has promised: "*Therefore I say to you, all things for which you pray and ask, **believe that you have received them, and they will be granted you.***" (Mark 11:24) My dear brothers and sisters - please believe that your prayer has been heard every time you pray! I need to add that this past July, during the trip that Marilyn and I led to Israel, we returned to Yardenit - and this time I was on the giving end instead of the receiving end - as Marilyn and I assisted 16 people who recalled and rededicated their baptisms at that very same place. God is good!

The Apostle Paul in Romans 8, serves as great encouragement that it is not the intention of Almighty God for us to suffer and be kept from a loving relationship with Him. God the Father sent Jesus to the cross - so that we might be restored; restored to the right relationship with Him, intended for mankind, from the beginning. Free from sin and able to come to God for

forgiveness when we fall; free from death – from eternal damnation “*For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.*” (Romans 8:38-39) Also from Paul – in that same letter are words that I pray with touch your heart the way they touched mine. Clarity and faith in the restoration that is only found in Jesus: “***Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and of death.***” (Romans 8:1-2) If you are carrying around baggage and guilt for things that you did years ago and repented of – get rid of it! Don’t carry around that baggage of something you did when you were 16 years of age when you picked up something that wasn’t yours – and every day the devil reminds you of it. Let it go! “***Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.***” Remarkable enough, that evening of June 21 – the day after my 48th birthday, along the shore of the Galilee, another man, named Tom, came over to me – after those prayers – and he told me: “God wants me to tell you – “There is now NO condemnation.”” He repeated this to me – and suddenly I felt free! I really and truly felt free! Up until 1995 I was a Roman Catholic who carried around guilt, who carried around shame, who carried around a sense that everything was my fault. That night I felt free; I truly felt free! I was free enough to be healed the next day, and then 2 days later I was free enough an En Geddi to hear God’s voice call me to be a priest – who told me I “must do this in grateful obedience!”

I want to suggest to you today that just as Jesus went to the cross to free us from sin and death – offering eternal life and forgiveness of sins repented, He also took our illness and disease with Him – offering healing to those who will faithfully receive it. The words of Peter’s first letter ring true: “*He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness; for by His wounds you were healed.*” (1Peter 2:24) The Prophet Isaiah proclaims the same: “*But He was pierced through for our transgressions, He was crushed for our iniquities; the chastening for our well-being fell upon Him, And by His scourging we are healed.*” (Isaiah 53:5)

In words just prior to today’s Holy Gospel, Jesus said “*The time is fulfilled, and the kingdom of God is at hand; **repent and believe in the gospel.***” (Mark 1:15) Through the innocent suffering of Jesus on His cross, the righteous anger of God has been satisfied and through His redeeming power and mercy – we are able to be made right with God. **We receive the fruit of Jesus’ ultimate sacrifice through repenting** –through turning away from our sinful behavior – placing our trust and confidence in Our Lord Jesus Christ – and allowing God to transform us – changing our sinful nature forevermore. We need to go before the cross and lay our sins, our burdens, our weaknesses at the feet of Jesus. We can receive complete and total forgiveness there and give God permission to crucify our sinful nature with Christ. Then we can move into a more powerful obedience, faithfulness, and righteousness, by the power of the Holy Spirit living within us.

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I just love the words of Psalm 103: *“Bless the LORD, O my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget none of His benefits; who pardons all your iniquities, who heals all your diseases.”* (Psalm 103:1-3) God has promised – and only God delivers! “Standing on the Promises of God!” The words from 2 Corinthians are so fitting: *“For as many as are the promises of God, **in Him they are yes!**”* (2 Corinthians 1:20) He wants to say YES to us – and not NO!

We are blessed that we have been given the cure! The only solution to what ails the world today can be found in Jesus Christ who is our Compassionate Healer – He is “the Way and the Truth and the Life” (John 14:6) and it is through the power of His Holy Word that we can be healed. The Word of God has incredible power; Jesus healed the sick and cast out evil just by speaking His Word. In the beginning, the universe was created simply by speaking it into being. **We need to recognize and trust that power – having a great faith like Abraham** – not based on anything that we have seen – but knowing that **God will do everything that He has promised!** “Standing on the Promises of God, My Savior”; not based on anything that we have seen – but knowing that **God will do everything that He has promised!** The prophet Isaiah recognized that very power by proclaiming: *“Do you not know? Have you not heard? Has it not been declared to you from the beginning? Have you not understood from the foundations of the earth?”* (Isaiah 40:21) He continues: *“those who wait for the LORD Will gain new strength; they will mount up with wings like eagles, they will run and not get tired, they will walk and not become weary.”* (Isaiah 40:31) That sounds like healing to me!

I want to encourage you to ask God to give you the courage to seek, in faith, **the healing that Christ has already paid for.** Ask Jesus to prepare your hearts and minds and seek His healing. If you are in need of healing and anointing – please see me after this service. It has been put on my heart to revive something in this church that has been gone for a little while – and that is if you are interested in being an intercessor – I would love to set up a schedule so that people who are in need of prayer could – after receiving the precious Body and Blood of Jesus – you could go to the back of the church and prayer with someone in teams of two. God wants you to be healed; He wants you to receive the precious gift that He has for His people. Who are His people – YOU are, better said – “all y’all!” Again I want you encourage you.

In the Epistle of James, chapter 5 beginning at verse 13 – considered by many to be the brother of Jesus *“Is anyone among you suffering? Then he must pray. Is anyone cheerful? He is to sing praises. **Is anyone among you sick? Then he must call for the elders of the church and they are to pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord; and the prayer offered in faith will restore the one who is sick, and the Lord will raise him up, and if he has committed sins, they will be forgiven him. Therefore, confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another so that you may be healed. The effective prayer of a righteous man can accomplish much.”***

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Right after we pray our prayers of the people we will have a time of confession and absolution – and I want to encourage you – if there is stuff that you are carrying around – give it to Him!

“Therefore there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus.”

Today is a new day in your life! Be free from that baggage; walk out of here as a free person, enlightened and lifted up in Christ Jesus. I want to encourage you to search no more for healing anywhere - except in the One who created and saved us – for by His sacrifice on the cross and redemption we are not only freed from sin and death – but from sickness. Trust in Him and what He has already done for you – and be clothed in His healing love. As Jesus told many – and tells each one of us here today, personally ***“Your faith has made you well!”***