

## The Waters of Healing

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*"Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity."  
~ Hippocrates*

*"There is more wisdom in your body than in your deepest philosophies."  
~ Frederich Nietzsche*

*"The secret of health for both mind and body is not to mourn for the past, not to worry  
about the future, but to live in the present moment wisely and earnestly."  
~ Buddha*

*"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it."  
~ Helen Keller*

### Scripture Passages :

**2 Kings: 5** - Naaman, the commander of the Syrian army, was highly respected and esteemed by the King of Syria. Naaman was a great soldier who suffered from a dreaded skin disease. His wife was an Israelite girl who had been captured by one of the army's raids. She told Naaman of a prophet, Elisha, from her land who she said could cure Naaman of his disease.

Naaman told the king, who gave him permission to go to Israel. So Naaman went with his horses and chariot and stopped at the entrance to Elisha's house. Elisha sent a servant out who told Naaman to go and wash himself seven times in the Jordan River and then he would be cured.

Naaman stomped off in a rage, annoyed that Elisha hadn't come out to speak with him personally and that what he asked seemed simple and foolish. But Naaman's servants said to him, "If the prophet had told you to do something difficult, you would have done it. Now why can't you just go to the river and wash yourself seven times?"

So Naaman went down to the River Jordan, dipped himself in seven times, as Elisha had instructed and he was cured.

**John 5: 2-9** - Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem, there is a pool with five porches. A large crowd of people were lying on the porches: the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. Jesus saw him lying there and knew that this man had been sick for a long time. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

The sick man answered, "Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred with healing. While I am trying to get in, someone else always gets there first." Jesus said to the man, "Get up, pack up your mat and walk." Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking.

### "The Waters of Healing" – Testimony

**Scott Winzeler** – *9:30 Service* - Three years ago, I proudly marked my life by what I did, by what I accomplished. I had been given a promotion and the job of reducing the number of offices my company was leasing, saving several million dollars. In retrospect, I could have seen this as working myself out of a job, and in May 2009 after completing

a huge project in our Alachua offices, it shouldn't have come as a surprise to me that my position had been eliminated. But I didn't see it coming and it came as a total shock.

You could if you wanted, paint a grim picture about my prospects that summer. 450,000 jobs a month were being cut. One out every 10 Americans was out of work. I was a generalist with a Bachelor's degree in Speech and Theatre Arts in a town with more PhD's per capita than some people think is really healthy. [I was 56 years old and couldn't go crying to Mommy.]

However, I have always been a spiritual person. Inside, I knew that something would eventually work out, but as the months wore on, staying in touch with that conviction became increasingly difficult. Luckily, I had a brilliant job coach who got me focused on basics. She stressed how imperative it was to connect with people as networking was critical to finding employment.

Additionally, I *had* to believe in myself. "You are going to kill your chances at a position if you come across as desperate," she would say at times when I was feeling exactly that. "It's okay to acknowledge how scary this can be, but nevertheless you've got to draw on your qualities if you want to convince people, as she would put it, 'that you would play well in their sandbox.'"

Aside from a small number of people at UCG, I knew few people outside my company, so I began my search here. I drew up a list of people to talk to. I met with the ministers. I reached out to other unemployed UCGers creating a weekly "unemployed however known" group. Everyone was a lifeline, lifting my spirits, introducing me to the larger community, keeping my thoughts in check. My daily goal was to meet someone, something for which I would have to shave and iron a shirt.

This process was an awakening. Rather than measuring my life by what I had accomplished, I began to measure my life by whom I met, by the depth of connection, by the bonds of the heart. Even though I eventually procured a position, the healing continues, especially when I stop and connect with others.

At the risk of sounding like I just received an Oscar, I wanted to express my gratitude to all members of the church whose hearts and goodwill made a huge difference. In particular: Bev, Carol, Charlie, Dom, Eric, Gary, Hal, John, Ken, Larry Matt, Michael, Perry, Sandy, Sanford, Stan, Stephen, and of course Isabelle.

In conclusion, I think "The Servant's Song" sums it up best:

*We are pilgrims on a journey; we are brothers/sisters on the road.*

*We are here to help each other walk the mile and bear the load.*

*I will weep when you are weeping; when you laugh, I'll laugh with you.*

*I will share your joy and sorrow 'til we've seen this journey through.*

**Jackie Davis - 9:30 service** - In August of 2008, my mother had a CAT scan, and called to tell me she had a "lesion on her pancreas". I flew to Virginia to be with her for the biopsy that confirmed her pancreatic cancer, and I didn't leave. My grief began with that phone call. My grief was a riptide. When you are caught up in a riptide, you are overwhelmed, and it's terrifying. Your instincts tell you to fight it.

But with a riptide, if you struggle, you will exhaust yourself and drown. To survive a riptide, you have to ride it, surrender to it, and eventually it will let you go and you can swim to shore. And so it was. (When I tried to avoid the grief, I was broken and angry.)

Wise people helped me to keep from drowning: Sandy told me to walk every day, and I did. Asha made tea, and told me to make friends with my grief, that there are jewels in that bottom land, and there were. Maryjane came to visit us from Mexico and made us laugh again. Amina sent me a book called "Mourning and Mitzvah" and I learned about mitzvahs, continuing the good works done by the deceased as a way of honoring them. A woman at a grief group spoke of unhealthy versus healthy mourning. Unhealthy mourning was when I thought "if only I'd insisted that she choose the other doctor" or feeling guilty about things I did as a teenager! I think everyone experiences this unhealthy mourning, it's part of it, but you just don't want to stay there. And healthy grief was knowing my touchstone was gone: who will I call, who will I report to, who will be proudest of me, who will love me best? Healthy grief was realizing what my mother was to me.

Before this riptide of grief, I would meditate and journal, but inconsistently as life would get in the way. During my mourning, these spiritual practices became the life preserver I clung to. My advice is to develop these practices now so they are in place when you need them!

I got so much support! My partner Mary came when I called. My son Joel brought his baby which my mother said was better than any pain medicine. My son Alan hiked in the mountains with me when I was alone. Sandra called me daily; X painted hearts for me; Andy made a CD mix for me; Klezmer band buddies mailed me banana bread and chocolate cookies; Vivian and Madeline helped me unload the U-Haul of my mother's things when I returned on Xmas Eve; and you all sent cards, food and flowers. And I knew you were holding me in your prayers. My water of healing comes from here, from the fountain in the courtyard of this, my spiritual home.

Grief stripped away parts of my self-image that were inauthentic; it brought clarity to my relationships; and it revealed how much my mother influenced me. And eventually the riptide let me go. Now, when I think of my mother, which I do every day, instead of feeling crushing pain, I feel sweetness and connection with her. I enjoy things that she would enjoy, look for the rabbit in the yard, the glimpse of the deer, and I savor the homemade jam for both of us.

In closing, here's a quote by Aeschylus I found in my journal that was from a UCG bulletin: *"And, even in our sleep, pain that will not forget falls drop by drop upon the heart. And in our despair, against our will, wisdom comes, by the grace of God."*

**Paul George – 11:00 Service** – In my 50's, I had a heart attack followed by urgent open heart surgery. What happened was a shock to me, to my loved ones, and my friends. Suddenly, we all seemed to lose our innocence; we were mortal.

At the end of my week in the hospital, the surgeon who had held my heart in his hands, told me that I had a 100% chance of heart problems in 4-7 years. The bad news was that I was threatened with losing everything. The good news was that I had 4-7 years to do something about that. I guess you could say that I was "scared healthy." I was lucky; I had a second chance.

To survive, I realized I had to make major changes. I permanently stopped drinking alcohol so I could better control my weight. I permanently eliminated beef, pork and other animal fats from my diet, and committed to vigorous exercise daily. I volunteer at NFRH weekly in the cardiac rehab unit. I meditate every morning.

I had been at the top of my game professionally; that had to go. I changed departments at UF, and quit a stressful consulting practice. But perhaps the most challenging part has been the daily, moment-to-moment awareness of my mortality and the speed at which life passes. But, as they say, so far, so good.

I was incredibly fortunate to be surrounded and firmly supported, from then until now, by a healing circle of love: a devoted spouse, a loving family, deeply caring friends and colleagues, and this church community. It was this web of loving support that held me during my initial healing and it has become the deep joy of my life today.

I recall telling Larry after my hospitalization, that if I lived another 15 years I would consider what happened to me to have been a blessing. As I near the 13-year mark, I can say that I already see it that way. I acknowledge my good fortune every day and the most remarkable thing of all is that while I could have skipped that event, that life-changing incident has actually enriched my life.

I surely don't recommend what happened to me as an easy way to change one's life but I have been given the chance to heal much more than my heart. I wouldn't want it any other way.

**Barbara Beynon – 11:00 Service** - Some thoughts on a year of healing: Fifteen years ago now, I was approaching a big transition in my life. After working at the Guardian ad Litem Program for 8 years, I had planned a year off -- to breathe and discern. Little did I know! Two weeks prior to my farewell party, I discovered a lump in my left breast. A week after that party, two days before Thanksgiving, I had a biopsy and received a diagnosis of cancer. I was shocked! I looked in the mirror and a seemingly healthy woman looked back. I was angry that uncertainty and unpleasant treatments were about to highjack my special year, and I was frightened. Adam, our son, was sixteen and away at school; Charlie, my beloved husband, knew too well what lay ahead. I was fifty-one and had thought the best was yet to come.

I stumbled through Advent and Christmas blessed by supportive family and friends and the beautiful diversion of Lessons & Carols, Handel's Messiah and the festive holiday I was determined to make happen for my family. Then began the year of treatments and learning to live with contradictions, the first of which was embracing the potential for healing while not assuming a cure. Other contradictions included feeling strong and vulnerable; being hyperaware of the many changes in my body and letting go so that my disease didn't consume me; being optimistic and realistic. I walked a fine line between hubris and humility, confident I could survive but recognizing I didn't have the ultimate control.

Intuitively I knew that healing lay in the wellspring of love and faith available to me and that I'd better pay attention. Surfacing from this wellspring were single moments of grace and patterns that became my sacred rituals; all involved safe people in safe spaces. Here are a few examples: Larry and Sandy responding immediately to our call for help; lunches and conversations with UCG friends; Charlie sitting with me during every chemo treatment and brushing my hair away one sunny Saturday morning; going shopping with Sandy for a wig; volunteering in the church office; being well enough, often enough, to travel to Ashville to visit Adam; Lia George helping me drive on one of those trips; Judy Hoffman taking me to the healing liturgy at Holy Trinity every Wednesday at noon; watching silly TV shows and reading anything that

made me laugh; the shared wisdom of cancer survivors; weekly runs to the Farmer's Market with Annie Pais and Mina Robinson; painting on Tuesday evenings; a centering meditation (in which I saw myself sitting in sunshine by the Salmon River—my favorite in Northern California) to help me focus during chemo and radiation; and worshipping in this sacred space with the members of this sacred community as often as possible. I was engulfed in an embarrassment of riches.

I believe the cure - the "C" word my doctor said I could use after 10 years had passed - came from working with skilled professionals, the science of the day, taking reasonable care of myself and the luck of the draw. The healing evolved out of acts of love and faith, and the luxury of time provided by that high-jacked year.

### **The Waters of Healing" – Sermon – Sandy Reimer**

I believe in the Waters of Healing, both literally and metaphorically. And I believe that we can place ourselves near – and in – those healing waters when our bodies are ill, when our souls are wounded, when our minds are exhausted, when our relationships are broken and when our hopes and dreams are shattered. We cannot predict or guarantee what the final result will be, but I do know that seeking out those waters of healing will make a difference. It's a lot like what I believe about prayer. I pray knowing that I cannot control the results of my prayer, but instead knowing that through prayer something changes. It is the same for me with healing waters.

The ancients believed that there was a powerful connection between the body and the spirit, an interconnection which meant an illness of one part correlated to an illness of the other. As a culture, we traveled a long road away from that understanding until recently. Now most of us – regardless of our religious orientation – would agree that the body, the mind, and the spirit are integrally linked and healing is a function of all three, working together. When I use the word healing today, I mean all kinds of healing: body, mind and spirit.

How do we find those healing waters? I chose the two scripture passages today because, for me, they offer insight into this question. It's good to remember that when we use scripture here, we are looking at the power of stories to illuminate the questions and issues of life and faith, and these two passages are stories of healing waters. Naamon is a story from the Hebrew people, early in the history of Israel, as they developed a sense of themselves as a nation rather than a loose confederation of tribes. This story was told, not read; you can imagine it being shared in the evenings, maybe around a fire. It addresses not only healing, but also a bridge between the Israelites and those people who were outside their Hebrew faith.

When we hear about Naamon in this story, he's powerful, the commander of the entire Syrian army. He's suffering from a dreaded skin disease. He listens to the advice of his young Hebrew wife's servant. He travels to someone whom he is told can offer healing. He is humbled by this great prophet Elisha who

won't even come out of his house to speak with Naaman. And yet Elisha offers Naaman a cure for his disease, offers it freely to Naaman, a Syrian. Naaman is skeptical, because what he is asked to do seems so simple and yet so foolish. Yet he follows through – not once, but seven times, he washes himself in the Jordan river. And he is healed.

The story reminds me that healing, of whatever kind, is a journey. Think of how far out of his physical, mental and spiritual comfort zone Naaman has to travel to find his healing waters. Healing is a journey of being proactive and a journey of seeking out those healing waters. It is a journey that includes a healthy skepticism, a willingness to take a risk, and a strong sense of hope and trust.

I thank Jackie and Scott, Paul and Barbara, who each in their own way shared with us a contemporary version of Naaman's story, as they actively sought out the people, the experiences, the wisdom, and the practices that brought them to their waters of healing. And then they stepped into those waters more than once with their whole selves. Their stories are also our stories, stories repeated over and over again in this congregation, if we have the time to ask and the wisdom to listen.

Barbara Brown Taylor, whom I quote often, was an ordained Episcopal minister at a large urban church in downtown Atlanta and then the single pastor of a small congregation in rural Clarkesville, Georgia. After fourteen years, she resigned from the ministry. In her book Leaving Church, Brown describes her decision as a journey toward the healing of her exhaustion and the healing of her soul. She remembers a wise old priest who asked her the question, "*What - is saving - your life - right now?*" That question continues to guide her on her journey.

Healing, says Barbara Brown Taylor, is another word for salvation, that old theological word that has so much deadweight baggage drowning it. "*Salvation,*" she says, "*is a word for the divine spaciousness that comes to human beings in all the tight places where their lives are at risk, regardless of how they got there, regardless of their theology or lack thereof.*"

I remind you that in the Gospel of Luke virtually every time the word salvation is used, it is followed by a story of healing. Salvation is more about healing than is about a doctrinal belief. Sometimes that salvation is an extended human hand or community, as Scott and Jackie, Paul and Barbara so beautifully reminded us. Sometimes that salvation is synchronicity that always has its own mystery and that Carl Jung said is never accidental. Either way salvation opens a door in what looked for all the world like a closed wall.

Few of us can choose our circumstances, but we can choose how we respond to them. To be healed is not only to recognize an alternative to what is killing us right now, but also to be able to act on that alternative. Or as

Hippocrates said, *"Healing is a matter of time, but it is sometimes also a matter of opportunity."*

At the end of June each year, I find myself identifying a lot with Barbara Brown Taylor. Unlike her, I haven't had to leave the ministry. Instead, I've just needed to leave town for a few weeks away at the beach, near the sight and sounds and feel of water. Each summer, that time by those healing waters saves my life, in every meaning of that word. What is saving your life right now? And what is separating me – and separating you – from what we need for healing?

I turn to the second scripture passage, the story of the man who waits by the pool of healing waters in Jerusalem. We are told that he had been ill for thirty-eight years. The healing water is right there next to him, and for years he has not managed to get himself into the water. "There is no one to put me in," he says. "When I try to get in, someone else always gets there first and there's no room for me." Jesus looks at him and says, "Get up and walk."

What I see in this story is myself, and the endless excuses I can make about not getting into the healing waters, not doing those things that can be life-saving. Most of us already know a lot about what we can do to help save our lives: eat right, exercise, sleep, reduce stress, have a spiritual practice like meditation or prayer or yoga, find community and support, and offer and seek forgiveness. We already know all these things, but, as the poet T S Eliot said, between the idea and the reality falls the shadow. Knowing is not enough. Something else has to propel us forward, cause us to stand up, get off our mat, and walk into those places where the healing waters are. This is the kind of existential moment when we face that shadow, our own limitations and resistance. The existentialist would say this is where we take the leap of faith, without any assurance of what is on the other side.

In Helen Keller words, *"Although the world is full of suffering, it is also full of overcoming it."* The key question of faith is what triggers overcoming our resistance, what triggers our reaching out for healing. Something – whether it is community, a mentor or counselor, a medical or spiritual AHA, an inner awareness or a mystical presence, a crisis, or hope or belief - something provides the bridge from the idea to the reality, from the suffering to the overcoming.

I don't know if there is any one word we would all agree on to describe what that something is. I do know that when we look back on our experiences of loss and illness, of wounds and pain, we can recognize in retrospect what happened, we can name those healing waters. As I have sat with and listened to numerable people in their journeys of healing, I am in awe of their stories and their ability to claim their healing.

I ask three things of us as we leave this service today: first, that we be open to the stories of healing all around us in this spiritual community; second, that we each look deeply into our own lives and acknowledge and claim without

embarrassment the healings we have experienced; and third, that we continue to ask the question, "What - is saving - my life - right now?" and then walk toward those healing waters, dipping ourselves in seven times, if that is what is needed. Amen.