

**Sermon preached at the Church of the Holy Trinity, Philadelphia
on Sunday December 9th 2007 by the Reverend Alan Neale
“The Church’s Ministry of Healing – How are you being saved?”**

Today is the second Sunday of Advent – the time in the church’s year when we try, by the grace of God, to slow down... walk with measured steps... and resist the frenetic flurry of pre-Christmas activity. Advent (from the Latin word Adventus) means “coming” and in this season we encourage one another to look for the coming of Jesus to us in many and various ways.

There are times when I feel rather like some liturgical King Canute... commanding the pounding waves of pre-Christmas busyness to stop and come no further... and then suddenly find myself covered with the seaweed of Christmas music and decorations. But the attempt is important and I hope I, and you perhaps, will never finally surrender the cause.

In Malachi 4:2 we read that the “Sun of righteousness will come with healing in his wings” or as the Message translation reads “The sun of righteousness will dawn on those who honor my name, healing radiating from its wings. You will be bursting with energy, like colts frisky and frolicking”.

Malachi’s prophecy connects Advent and Healing and so, this Advent, we are thinking together, learning together, about the Church’s Ministry of Healing – a ministry given to the church by God, a ministry exercised in the power of God and a ministry to proclaim the presence and glory of God!

Last week, we considered the nature, the extent of salvation. First we learnt that for Jesus, in the Bible and in theology... salvation and healing cannot be divided, separated. God’s will for me, for you, is that we be saved, be healed, be made whole and this is the ministry we share both inside and outside the walls of this church. Second we learnt the extent of salvation and healing... it is for all the people (faith in high definition is not required), for all of our being (mind, body, soul and relationships) and it is for all time (it is a process).

This week, “How are we being saved? How are we being healed?”. A new friend of mine has a question he often asks people when

meeting them, “So, what’s going on?”. I think it’s a great question... it shows an interest but it also assumes that something “is going on”... we need realize, we need accept, we need believe that God’s work of healing is always, somehow, “going on” in and around us. That, somehow, we are caught up in the process of “ being healed”.

But how is this happening?

The last parish in which I served in Rhode Island was a small stone chapel in a quiet spot near Newport, surrounded by a graveyard, trees and alongside the Sakonnet River. Time and again, very regularly, I would enter the building and have a strong, sometimes overwhelming, sense of the presence of God. And I noticed that visitor after visitor shared the same experience... often being moved to tears as they entered the building. To this day I am unsure how this happened but I conjecture this... the Chapel was built on an ancient American Indian reservation and that its location somehow enabled it to be “plugged into” a power source of spiritual, psychic energy – it sometimes happens for the worse, why not therefore the good.

Friends, we are being healed as we “plug ourselves into”, connect with, be immersed by the source of divine energy, light, salvation and healing. “One with the mighty healing power of God, we are whole in body, mind and spirit”.

Look at the blindingly obvious theme of today’s readings... Isaiah speaks of the Spirit, Paul speaks of the Spirit and John speaks of the Spirit.

We are being healed as we welcome the Spirit into our lives... we have a Scriptural promise that “the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead will also dwell in our mortal bodies”... now there is power, power to heal

But how do we connect to, hook up with, unite with this power. There are so many ways... access to the medical professions is definitely one way for the Church has always thought of partnership not opposition when thinking about the medical professions. The first ordained minister I knew well always said “grace” before he took any medication... by this means he saw God at work in many different ways. We plug in to this power by Sacraments, by worship,

by fellowship, prayer and godly conversation but today three specific ways to connect with this energy, this power source.

We admit our need honestly. We anticipate our healing with excitement. We accept God's work with gratitude.

We admit our need honestly, and thus we are enabled all the more to share in God's purpose of healing and salvation. But sometimes, perhaps often, we feign good health, we pretend to be whole and refuse to accept that there is simply, chronically, something wrong with us. 'How are you?' "Oh fine" – whether this is asked of us by another person or even by God! You may recall the story of the church, years ago, that was preparing to use the new prayer book. The rector wanted to impress the bishop and so he drilled those people week after week especially with the beginning of the service. Remember, he said, as soon as you hear the words The Lord be with you, respond immediately And also with you. Come the day of the Bishop's Visitation the glorious procession made its way to the sanctuary. The Bishop realized that his microphone was not working so after the first hymn, he tapped the microphone and said, There's something wrong with this mike and the well-trained people responded And also with you! Friends we all need admit that there is something wrong with us! We need admit our powerlessness. We consider foolish the person who will not visit a doctor when they feel physically ill; likewise foolish is the person who will not to the creator of life when there is something wrong. John Baptist's words are for us now... repent, turn around, accept you are not whole.

We anticipate our healing with excitement. We need, we need deeply, to hear and receive prophetic words that stir our souls, that kindle hope, that rouse expectation... and especially so when we consider the church's ministry of healing. Consider the glorious prophecy in Isaiah 11... the nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp... the leopard shall lie down with the lamb... they shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain! Now the cynic, such as Woody Allen, finds this hard to believe... his biblical commentary is that the wolf shall lie down with the lamb... but the lamb will not get much sleep! But, Christian, we need be delivered from such cynicism, despair and hopelessness and rather be stirred to anticipate God at work within us... such is one powerful means to connect with the healing energy and will of God in Christ. God does bring wholeness and health to all those who seek it (and many

times to those who do not seek it)... so we should anticipate this with excitement.

And, we accept God's work with gratitude. There is a man who worships regularly here during the week... whenever he receives communion, whenever he receives prayer for healing he responds simply, "Thank you Jesus" and, thereby, I believe he connects deeply with the healing power and energy of God. Paul urges the church, the Christian, to be "welcoming", to live and breathe hospitality. Friends, we need continually welcome and be hospitable to God and to thank Him for His love, His work within us. It is almost as if our gratitude to God "seals the deal", is the final signature that locks in the promise.

How are we being healed? We are being healed as we connect to God's almighty power... I encourage you to ask God for help, health and healing and I urge you to go one step further... to encourage others to pray. AMEN

© Church of the Holy Trinity Rittenhouse Square. All rights reserved.