Community "Religious Faith and Healing" 5/1/22

Mark 5:24b-34

Illust. Dr. Randy Byrd, a staff cardiologist at San Francisco General Hospital and professor at University of California, did a study to examine the effects of prayer on the healing of patients. During a 10 month study of 393 patients assigned to the Coronary Care Unit, 192 of these people were put in a group that was prayed for by home prayer groups, and 201 of the patients were put in a group that was not prayed for. The study was designed according to the highest standards of clinical testing imaginable.

Neither patients, nurses, nor doctors knew which group each patient was in. Dr. Byrd recruited Roman Catholic, United Methodist, Baptist and Jewish groups around the country to pray for the designated patients. Prayer groups were given names of patients, a bit about their conditions, and were asked to pray each day, but were given no instructions on how to prayer. The results startled many!

Prayed-for patients were 5 times less likely to require antibiotics; 3 times less likely to develop fluid filling their lungs. None require breathing tubes, compared to 12 in the other group. Fewer of the prayed for patients died. Someone said that if the technique had been a new drug or a new surgical procedure, it would have been heralded as a "breakthrough." But since it was prayer, it hardly got mentioned.

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This is just one of a number of studies which are suggesting that God and religious faith have power to bring healing and wholeness to life.

Illust. Larry Dossey, an M.D., has written a book on prayer and medicine called

*Healing Words: The Power of Prayer and the Practice of Medicine.* In this book he tells how prayer and meditation can have a healthy effect on our bodies, and how a simple attitude of prayerfulness seems to set the stage for healing.

In his own practice, he decided that withholding prayer was just like refusing to use a potent drug or surgical procedure. He doesn't pray for cancers to be cured or pain to go away, however, because he believes "non-directed" prayers have been shown to be more effective. He says, "I would invoke the Absolute, asking only that 'Thy will be done' in the lives of the patients I was about to see."

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Illust. Some years ago *Good Housekeeping* magazine published an article entitled

"Think Yourself Well." It talks of the connection between mind and body, and the effect thoughts and attitudes can play on our being healthy or sick.

"Researchers are also investigating the role that religious belief itself plays in healing. In one study, heart-surgery patients who said they depended on God for

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strength and comfort were *three times* more likely to survive than those who didn't. Another showed that among elderly women recuperating from hip-replacement surgery, those with strong religious beliefs could walk significantly farther upon discharge than the non-believers. To David Larson, M.D., an adjunct professor of psychiatry at Duke University Medical School…and a devout believer, the conclusion seems clear: 'A lack of religious belief,' he says, 'may be hazardous to your health.'"

The article relates research done at an arthritis pain treatment center in Clearwater, Florida. "Researchers divided 60 rheumatoid-arthritis sufferers into three groups. Two of the groups participated in sessions in which members of a Christian ministry prayed for them through the traditional laying on of hands. One of the two groups was also prayed for from a distance over a period of several months. The remaining patients were in a control group which received only medication – no prayer.

The results were astonishing. "At the beginning of the experiment one patient had 49 tender joints; but after four sessions of the laying on of hands – concentrated on areas of pain – the number dropped to eight. Six months later, the man reported feeling completely pain-free. Another patient had been in so much pain that she had difficulty simply standing up from a chair." After being prayed for she was able to get up and out of a chair with ease.

One of the nurse practitioners who participated in this experience said, "If you could get the kind of results we're seeing with a drug, it would be all over the papers."

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Illust. Here's a newspaper article: "Senior's faith linked to lower blood pressure."

Another Duke University related study of 4,000 North Carolinians ages 65 or over

found that those who participated in religious activities were 40% less likely to have high blood pressure. "They found that older residents who attended religious services at least once a week had consistently lower diastolic readings, as did those who read the Bible or prayed regularly. The diastolic reading measures blood pressure when the heart relaxes."

Illust. Then there's this news clip: "Are life's stresses making you ill? Pray! Meditative prayer helps heal body, mind and spirit, says Harvard psychologist.

"Doctors say medical research sustains what the Bible says: Prayer is as good for your body as it is for your soul. The power of meditative prayer to reduce or eliminate tension-related diseases was documented last week by Dr. Jared Kass, a behavioral psychologist and Harvard Medical School lecturer…(his own research

shows that) repeated meditative prayer effectively calms the hyper-arousal-state induced by the stresses of modern life."

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Illust. One more article, entitled, "Why Doctors Say Faith is Powerful Medicine".

"Hundreds of studies published in mainstream medical journals show that people who attend religious services, pray and read Scriptures: live longer…are less prone to depression, suicide, alcoholism and other addictions…have lower rates of cancer, heart disease and other major illnesses…recover better from sickness/surgery…and cope better with chronic illness. These are the conclusions of a year long investigation by the National Institute for Healthcare Research, a private Maryland-based organization."

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*It seems to me that there is mounting evidence that things like faith in God and a relationship with God, our own prayers or the prayers of others, the practice of anointing with oil, meditation, and other spiritual resources play a vital role in our experiencing health in body, mind and spirit!*

***Now we need to be careful here.***

This doesn't mean that if you are ill, you don't have faith. Or that all believers will be pain free and healthy, and every non-believer will be sick. Of course not.

Nor is this meant to downplay the importance of doctors, and modern medicine and surgery.

But it is to say that spiritual resources are available that can help bring healing, and make us be a more whole person.

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**A large part of Jesus' ministry involved healing sick people.**

Jesus came announcing that God's kingdom was breaking into the world. God's rule was breaking into the world so filled with evil, pain, sickness, and death. One of the signs that the new realm where evil and sickness and death would be eliminated was that Jesus healed people – set them free from sickness and pain.

After Jesus left this earth and returned to heaven, His followers, the church, continued this ministry of Jesus with miraculous healings recorded in the New Testament.

Many churches today hold healing services. At Community UMC we take time in our worship service the first Sunday of the month for special prayers for healing.

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BRIDGE…let's look at a few Scriptures that relate to healing, and what we can learn

 from them…

Read Mark 5:24b-26

Here was a woman who had been hemorrhaging for 12 years! She had tried everything. She spent all she had on doctors and cures, with no success.

Imagine how embarrassing this must have been for her! How it limited her activities. In addition, because the law in Leviticus said she was ritually "unclean",

she would have been ostracized from some social functions and participation in the synagogue. *But she had faith!*

Read verses 27-29

She had heard about Jesus. And *there He was,* inthe crowd. If she could just touch the hem of His garment – that's all she'd have to do!

But there were obstacles in her way. (1) She was a woman. For her to approach Him in public was highly improper. (2) She was ritually unclean. This would make Him unclean if she touched Him.

But she didn't let these obstacles get in the way! She did what she had to do to just touch the hem of His clothing, and immediately she felt the hemorrhaging stop. And Jesus felt the healing power flow out from Him!

*Can you and I envision ourselves touching the hem of His garment, and finding His power surging into us to heal us: physically, emotionally, mentally? Can we not have her kind of simple faith to see this happen!*

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***Part of that faith can include a positive attitude, even humor!***

Proverbs 17:22 says, "A cheerful heart is good medicine…".

Illust. Rodney Dangerfield once said, "I told my doctor there's something wrong with me. Every time I look in the mirror I throw up." My doctor said, "Look at it this way: your eyesight is perfect."

The healing power of a cheerful spirit, a positive attitude, and faith and trust in Christ

the Healer.

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Let's look at Psalm 32. Read Psalm 32:1-4.

The psalm writer is talking about *forgiveness.* "Happy are those whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered" Psalm 32:1.

Notice how he describes what it was like before he confessed his sin to God and found forgiveness. "My body wasted away…my strength was dried up."

 There's a connection between our mind, our body, our spirit. If we're sick or

 dysfunctional in our attitude or in our spirit, this can be passed onto the body as

 physical illness.

 If our relationship with God is unhealthy, if we're still in our sins and haven't

 trusted our Savior for forgiveness, it can weight us down physically and produce

 all kinds of physical ailments.

But notice verse 5: read Psalm 32:5.

Jesus died on the cross to forgive our sins and remove our guilt and shame. He fulfilled what the prophet Isaiah was moved to write: "Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases…he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities…and by his bruises we are healed" Isaiah 53:4-5.

Getting right with God…confessing our sins and turning them…trusting Christ our Savior and Healer has tremendous power to bring wholeness and wholesomeness into our sick and broken lives!

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BRIDGE…one more Scripture:

Read James 5:14-16

These are instructions circulated in the early Church. What should they do if someone in the church is sick? They should gather the church together and…..pray!

 Notice, they are to confess their sins to one another – make sure the pray-ers

 are right with God, and in harmony with each other! And pray!

I talked earlier in this message about studies that have shown us the healing that can take place (sometimes remarkably) through prayer and meditation.

*Religious faith can have a huge, positive part to play in our finding wholeness and healing – in mind, body and spirit!*