

Healing Upon Healing – Mark 7:31

Grace, mercy and peace...

If you'll bear with me for a moment, I would like to begin with a story that gets at what we're dealing with in these words about our Lord in our text for today, the Holy Gospel reading. My youngest son, who was confirmed here at Mt Olive, graduated from high school when I was stationed in Germany, in Heidelberg. The high school came to me and said, "It's our custom to ask a chaplain who has a son or daughter in the graduating class to please preach, plan and lead the baccalaureate service. It would be at the huge church downtown. It is a Protestant church, so it's not a cathedral, but it is that big. Stained glass, huge pipe organ, everything."

I found the biggest problem planning the service is that there was this committee of 40 teachers students and parents (death by committee) that tried to put a lot of extra content in that did not belong there, such as a parent who said, "I want my daughter to read her award winning poem about trees and loving animals." So, in the past this service went close to 2 hours long. I would edit out the extraneous parts and told everyone this service will be done in one hour.

To close the service, there was a Scottish bagpipe band who would lead the recessional marching out to Amazing Grace. They have done this for the last 10 years. I asked "Please make sure the bag pipe band knows we will get done in one hour." Well, as the last hymn begins, right at 55 minutes, I look around and get a sinking feeling because I don't see the bagpipers. I go off to the side, do sign language to the assistant principal, the head of the committee (WHERE ARE the BAG PIPERS? - cell phone motion). She runs out with her cell phone comes back in, calls me off the chancel and says, "The

bagpipers did not believe you that the service would be done in one hour. It's never happened before. They are in a local pub having German refreshments. They are now running down the street butt, it is a half-mile away. They won't be here for 5 minutes. One of my son's friends was in this very talented acapella singing group. So, I told the assistant principal to go fetch those kids and tell them they're singing. Well, they get up and turn around and see a thousand people, Americans and Germans, so they have total stage fright. So, they start a little tentatively: "Sometimes in our life, we all have pain, we all have sorrow, but if we are wise, we know that there's always tomorrow." As they are about to get to the chorus, you know the words, "Lean on me, I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on," I see the organist slide back on the bench, and guess what the pipe organ does? The pipe organ suddenly thunders out, 'Lean on me!' The young people, now inspired, take courage, and they start choreography, swaying - a Motown moment . The young lady motions for the congregation to join in. So, now, there are a thousand people having a sing along, "Lean on Me." And. as if we'd planned it that way, the bag pipers come in and lead us out to Amazing Grace.

Ok, thank you for bearing with me. I thought, "If you take those two songs together, this really works, that really summarized what we were getting at in that service. How do you get through life, when there will be pain, grief and sorrow, with some sense of joy, God's blessing? We have to LEAN UPON God's amazing grace and then, sharing and celebrating that grace with one another, carry on.

Which takes us back to our reading. The question is, "In this life, when we eventually do have pain, grief and sorrow, what do you do? As the people of God, we lean upon God's amazing grace, which we then can do no other than to share and

celebrate that grace with each other and the world. This reading, phrasing it a bit differently puts in terms of healing, but it is the same thing. In the midst of this rough, painful world, to carry on, the people of God LEAN UPON this healing grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and then share and celebrate that with the world.

I've entitled his "One healing upon another," As our Lord brought that man in the story healing, not one iota less he brings His Amazing healing power to us and to share as the people of God.

When Christ walked about during his earthly ministry, word got out that there was someone who could take broken and hurt lives and put them back together again. One day, some of those people who had gotten wind of what Christ could do, brought their friend to Jesus. It says he was deaf and could hardly talk. They begged Christ to heal the man. In a simple, compassionate but, oh so powerful way, Jesus healed the man.

Christ showed deep compassion for the man. There was a huge crowd there for Christ to minister and teach to, yet he left the crowd to care of the one man. Christ loved the whole world we know, but somehow He always found time to care of the individual. Christ took time out for one man!

He led the man away from the crowd. You get the feeling that Christ wanted to get the man away from the distraction of all the other people, so the man could concentrate on the healer. Christ put his fingers in the man's ears. He spit and touched the man's tongue. In a physical way, by touching the man and looking up to heaven, it was like Christ used sign language to show the man what He was about to do. Not only does this Great Physician have a great bedside manner, He also has the power, the cure. He looked up to heaven and said, "Ephatha," Be opened.! One of the words that jumps out at

you in the Gospel of Mark is the word," immediately." He uses it all the time with Christ's miracles. Instantaneously, the man began to hear and speak plainly. It says they were overwhelmed with amazement". They shared the good news all over the place.

The man's friends said, "This man, Jesus, even makes the deaf hear and the mute speak. He has done everything well." That's for sure. He does all things well. This man's friends probably went home thinking that this was the greatest miracle possible and nothing could be greater. Wrong! This miracle, this healing was written down, so that you and I could understand a far greater miracle and healing, the miracle of the cross and the empty tomb.

. This reminds us that you and I are spiritually healed. We have sins for given and stand right before God. Jesus came that you had I would live forever! For that man, Jesus healed his body. On Calvary and at Easter, he healed our souls.

There is one healing after another here. There is the healing for a deaf man long ago. There is also healing for us in that Cross and empty tomb of Jesus Christ. Luther said the two most important words in the Christian faith are "for me." Jesus did it all FOR ME. We get reminded of that in his meal. Christ comes FOR ME. In the water of Baptism, the Holy Spirit puts all that healing grace in MY heart.

And then the people of God bring that healing grace to a world, the people we know who need it so much in so many ways. The song those young people sang might seem a bit corny, overly sentimental, but you know, it's true. Until, we get to heaven, we do all have pain and sorrow. So, does everybody else. We can help. A Rabbi wrote a book a few years back, "When bad things happen to good people." He said the wrong people have car accidents; the wrong people get cancer; the wrong people get divorced.

Please believe me, I don't want to say or imply as some religious traditions do, that we tell people if you just pray and believe those problems are magically cured. But just as the love of the heavenly Father was incarnated, embodied, wrapped up as a gift for us, in His Son Jesus Christ, God's love still comes as gift, through us to those hurting people . Christ told us to abide in His love and then love one another the way He loved us. St Paul told us to bear one another's burdens. One of those modern translations of Scripture, *Good News for Modern Man* has a marvelous illustration of that passage. It has a stick figure. The man is bent over carrying a heavy load, but there is another person behind that heavy load, as if to day, "I got your back." We have the healing grace and power to share of our Lord Jesus Christ to bear one another's burdens.

Mt. Olive has a remarkable, wonderful history of bringing Christ's healing grace to this community. I have only visited occasionally here for the last 15 years, but in that time, you've had remarkable growth. Today, of course, we celebrate what Pastor Sizemore and Lisa have meant to this family of God for 20 years. Gifted leadership and total dedication. A gifted, talented, shepherd I've admired in many ways. St Paul told, Timothy, a Pastor: you need perseverance (steadfastness), pursue love, godliness, gentleness endure suffering. You've had a remarkable shepherd who has done all that. As a veteran of the parish, I also must put in a plug for awareness of what the Pastor's wife does, this one in particular. Music, VBS Sunday school, youth on and on as well as, bringing along her own bunches of children and grandchildren.

I began by telling a personal story, but of course, what Mt Olive is all about is the story of our Lord Jesus Christ and his amazing healing grace. That healing grace is still so powerful. Let's tell the story. Amen.