

Christ Episcopal Church

2 Emerson Street

East Norwalk, Connecticut 06855

The Ninth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 11 (B)

July 22, 2018

DRAFT

“Healing the healers”

8 AM and 10 AM Sermons

by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel according to

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

The apostles gathered around Jesus and told him all that they had done and taught. He said to them, “Come away to a deserted place all by yourselves and rest a while.” For many were coming and going, and they had no leisure even to eat. And they went away in the boat to a deserted place by themselves. Now many saw them going and recognized them, and they hurried there on foot from all the towns and arrived ahead of them. As he went ashore, he saw a great crowd; and he had compassion for them, because they were like sheep without a

shepherd; and he began to teach them many things....

When they had crossed over [the Sea of Galilee], they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

O Lord, give us hearts for helping those who are suffering and for healers. Amen.

Evelyn Underhill has written that the best that could be said of clergy is that they are sheepdogs: sometimes we do a good job helping the Good Shepherd, and sometimes we just bark a lot and cause general confusion among the flock.

This reminds me of a recent Facebook post where a chicken is seen herding a

group of cows. The chicken thought of itself as a shepherd and perhaps had learned from watching other animals move the herd. The chicken, however, did not seem to know the herder's basic role is to bring in the herd for safety and feeding; herding in and of itself is generally not so functional unless it fulfills a general purpose of feeding or healing or moving others to a safe place.

I recall leading three new clergy people around with me early one morning at Ground Zero at the World

Trade Centers site in 2001. We were walking north up West Street and rounded a muddy corner on our right and came upon about half a dozen EMS gator trucks parked around a big void in Building Two; many of the generally hardened emergency workers were sobbing, and I realized something serious was happening—I overheard another worker say that they had just discovered the remains of many in that building who had been trapped together in a small area in that massive pile of debris. As I looked over at my clergy group, I could

see the looks of horror on their faces, even though we did not see the deceased directly, and I quickly realized that I needed to get my group to a place of respite. This was their first tour of duty, and they had not been expecting the possibility of the deep emotions others feel when they see something they never wanted to witness. So, with their quick agreement we walked to the nearest respite center about three blocks away and sat around drinking cup after cup of coffee and talking about this and that. It was not immediately apparent to me how

that sight and experience had deeply affected my fledgling team, but I would later learn that one had left the ministry and another had to have surgery for a brain tumor that had apparently been triggered by breathing some of the fumes arising from the still burning pile. My flock had survived, but at a significant cost. Even care workers can be readily overstressed. And, I myself after months of working at that site found I needed serious debriefing to help cope with all the images of suffering and destruction. I can imagine what chaplains in war-torn

areas must experience daily. Not only soldiers have post traumatic stress disorders, but people in all sorts of helping professions, EMS, police, fire men and women, all find themselves in situations of stress overload. And hospital workers and nursing home workers have to steel themselves as well and get back to work as though nothing happened.

When I took training as a police chaplain, we learned the highest rate of suicide is among police; they often are required to go directly back into action,

regardless of what they may have experienced at a serious accident scene or in a difficult arrest situation. We heard of one sergeant who had been brought up on charges when he did not immediately respond to a second emergency call; he had just been ‘driving around’ to clear his mind and emotions from the previous challenging call. And his job was now on the line.

One of the duties of a chaplain is to help emergency workers get quickly back on duty—there are always fires and crimes to be contained, and there are a

limited number of people to handle all the emergency calls and traumas. But the issue of more in-depth healing for emergency workers is still not being addressed and remediated in many communities who look upon their emergency workers often as automatons, not as real people with real feelings and real human concerns, even though they may have chosen a particular helping profession voluntarily.

Jesus saw the wear and tear that his disciples had faced after he had sent them out two by two; they were elated

about their successes, and, quote, “told him all that they had done and taught.”

But I suspect that it was not all roses for them.

My New York apartment building has a garage which is used by many patients at Sloan Kettering Memorial Hospital which has cancer treatment centers nearby; there is a shuttle bus that runs continuously during the weekdays taking patients and their helping companions to one of the hospital sites. More than once when I am going to or leaving my car, someone has come up to me for prayer,

for themselves, or for a loved one.

Pointing to the bag of liquid in his hand, a man said, “I am holding an infusion for my next treatment for esophageal cancer.” Another woman who was accompanying an elderly woman, walked up to me holding the hand of her friend. She said, “I am not a Christian, but would you please pray over my mother? She is very ill.” And, of course I did. But every person there will be in contact with many others at the hospital.

People get gravely ill even in our time of very advanced treatments—there are

for example 200 specific drugs for treating 200 different lung cancers, but there are over 400 different lung cancers which have been genotyped, so researchers are not even halfway finished. A specific lung cancer drug only works if it is given for the one specific cancer it remediates; and the healing results are amazing when that is done. But genotyping is mandatory.

Can you imagine a time when even a boiled tree bark with its content of crude aspirin was not generally known? In the first century, pain remedies were few and

far between, if they existed at all—that fact among others led to the surge of people coming to the only know healer in the land, Jesus.

Jesus Christ had a healing power none of us has, but his healing examples have been encouraging medical scientists for years to find ways to do what Jesus could do ‘with a touch of his cloak’.

May we have sincere respect for those who are in healing and caring professions, and if we ever have the power to help them in their own healing,

may we allow God's Holy Spirit to
inspire us to do so. Amen.

Description:

Jesus was a healer of enormous proportions, and his examples continue to inspire us. May we also be aware of how others in healing and helping professions also need healing themselves, and may we help them find that healing.

Tags:

Cancer, Sloan, Kettering, healing, Jesus, Christ, professions, police, fire, EMS, nursing, hospital, garage, debrief, World Trade, emergency, workers, respite, ill, ministry, trauma, suicide, helping, lung, shepherd, safety, treatment

St. Stephen's Episcopal ProCathedral

35 S. Franklin Street

Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania 18701

The Eighth Sunday after Pentecost:

Proper 11 (B)

July 19, 2015

DRAFT

“Sheep without a home”

A Sermon by the Rev. Joe Parrish

The Holy Gospel

Mark 6:30-34, 53-56

Give us hearts of hunger for learning and teaching and healing, O Lord, and let us not forget the poor. Amen.

Dewitt Jones tells about a photographer who while walking down the street one day came upon a man who was choking. “What a picture,” he thought. “This says it all: A man, alone, in need. What a message!” He fumbled for his camera and light meter until the poor fellow who was choking realized that help was not forthcoming. He grabbed the photographer's arm and

gasped, “I'm turning blue!” “That's all right,” said the photographer, patting the fellow's hand, “I'm shooting color film!”

Just noticing suffering isn't enough. The word “compassion” means to “suffer with.” Throughout his ministry, Jesus involved himself in the sufferings of others.

The passage we are considering today omits the large middle section of the feeding of the five thousand for the second time we have used the new Revised Common Lectionary. In the omitted section we remembered that

Jesus fed the hungry after he taught them; and in the following section we have for today, we hear how Jesus healed the sick. He also put his hand out and touched lepers. Even Sunday school children know the shortest verse in the Bible: “Jesus wept,” which reminds us that Jesus not only saw, but Jesus entered into the sorrows of others.

<http://www.sermonsuite.com/free.php?i=788014099&key=fefdL3cMssxysf6i>

But the specific verses we have in our new gospel lesson for today focus on the

fact that Jesus taught the people “many things.” And he was present to the people who were sick or who were friends of the sick who brought their friends to just touch the fringe of Jesus’ cloak for their healing and health.

I fondly remember my Grandmother Parrish who always gave me her big ‘bear hug’ each time I visited her and my grandfather in Florence, Alabama. She was always the ‘hostess with the mostest’ and would have her delicious hot and gooey cinnamon rolls ready for us as soon as we got out of the car. She

was perhaps a precursor of “Cinnabon.” Unfortunately, now I am allergic to wheat, so I can pass by the Cinnabon store without the compulsion to buy one, but their wonderful odor reminds me of my grandmother’s love and hugs. What a wonderful memory! The unconditional love of my Grandmother is something I have never forgotten and never will forget.

It perhaps doesn’t take much for us to be memorable to others. Giving them a free bag of food is one way we do this at St. Stephen’s, and your generous

offerings of boxed and canned goods each Sunday helps us enormously in doing that, as does all your volunteer help and clothing offerings. We began this ministry over two decades ago not realizing the impact of hunger right in our midst here in Wilkes-Barre.

Writing about another time and place, the Russian writer Leo Tolstoy said, “I beheld the misery, cold, hunger, humiliation of thousands of my fellow human beings ... I feel, and can never cease to feel, myself a partaker in a crime which is constantly being

committed, so long as I have extra food while others have none, so long as I have two coats while there exists one person without any ... I must seek in my heart at every moment, with meekness and humility, some opportunity for doing the job Christ wants done.”

One of the great unmet needs we have in our community here is transitional housing. You may recall the story I told a few months ago about a couple, a son with a big cast on his leg and his mother who were sitting for some time on the indoor bench at the Parish House

entrance. The son, I would estimate his age in his mid-twenties, replied to me when I asked them if they needed some help, that they needed transportation to get to where they lived. So, I offered to drive them to their home. After we got seated in my car and all seatbelts were fastened, I reached for my GPS and asked to what address could I take them. And they replied, “Oh, we don’t have an address; we are homeless.” And I noted that “homeless” was not on my GPS, so could they give me an approximate address near where they were living.

Occasionally I do input a town on my GPS when I don't know the exact street name, and one option that usually comes up is "Anywhere." But "Anywhere" usually means the town hall or some central public county administration building. However, we are already close to "Anywhere" here in Wilkes-Barre, and I thought twice about perhaps taking them to the County Courthouse. But they responded, 'Do you know the CVS Drugstore on South Main?' I did know where that was, so off we sent to that CVS. Of course, when we got there,

where next? They said ‘Just let us out here; it is near St. Mary’s Soup Kitchen and we can walk from there. They will be serving in a couple of hours.’ Along the way they told me that they had just visited our church’s free clinic downstairs where they were consulting about the son’s broken leg—“It is almost well,” the son said. “In a couple of weeks they can take off my cast.” And they said they had been in our downstairs shelter here at St. Stephen’s for a month; then the director of the city homeless program (that is not our Deb) said they

had to leave. One month is the limit for homeless staying in the shelter program here in Wilkes-Barre, and in our church. When I expressed surprise that they had been discharged from the shelter system while the son's leg was still in a cast, they told me that others worse off than themselves were discharged the same way: "A homeless young mother with a child had also been let go from the shelter," they said. I tried to find out where all these discharged people were now staying, and the best I could learn was underneath the South Street Bridge,

next to St. Nicholas Roman Catholic Church. They said some nice church person had given them a tent to live in. Subsequently I have seen people walk off the sidewalk beside that bridge and turn to walk beside St. Nicholas and down underneath that bridge. When I asked how many people lived there, they said, “Quite a few”, but they did not know exactly how many.

So, there is an urgent need both to expand the shelter system of Wilkes-Barre and surrounding towns as well as to build what is called, “Transitional

Housing,” where people are housed for several month’s rent free while they are working so they can build up enough savings to get into some room somewhere which always requires a security deposit of a month or two rent. Best I can tell, such transitional housing is nearly non-existent here, and the shelter system has long overflowed.

Last year when we hosted the annual homeless Memorial Dinner here: about twenty to thirty homeless people showed up for the meal. I spoke to several of them and learned none of them had been

in our shelter, but they lived in tents in various parts of the City; our regular homeless folk downstairs for 19 weeks a year were out in a Camp in Dallas that week. But adding our 23 homeless here in the downstairs shelter plus the 25 to 30 who showed up for the Memorial Service totaled to about fifty homeless people we could immediately identify; and the son with the broken leg and his mother and the homeless woman with her child were not among them, so that fifty is surely only a sampling of who is homeless here in Wilkes-Barre today.

Who will take this on as a new ministry here--hopefully along with other churches and volunteer agencies as well?

One of the volunteer ministries I did in New Jersey, for which I have not yet found a replacement for myself, is as an affiliate president for Habitat for Humanity. Habitat for Humanity builds homes, with the family's help called "Sweat Equity", decent homes for those currently living in poverty situations, rat and roach infested apartments, too small for the number in their family, and perhaps with no kitchen to cook food.

Poverty is a bear. So, I have helped build homes for those who do have a job, actually for a family usually with two or three jobs at the minimum, and who can pay off the interest free mortgage Habitat offers. It is a very good program for those who are employed in minimum wage jobs, if they have more than one of those low paying jobs. But for people who can work in only a single job, Habitat is unable to build a home which can be paid off with such a minimal income. So, there is a great need for a program here that provides housing that

is smaller than the 900 square foot homes Habitat builds.

“When World War II ended, the members of a church in Frankfurt, Germany, began reconstructing their bombed-out sanctuary. One of the main objects to be restored was a statue of Christ that had been completely broken apart. All the pieces of Jesus were found except the hands. After long debate, the congregation decided to leave the figure without hands. Under it they inscribed the words: “Christ has no hands but our hands.” The job that Christ wants done

still involves compassion. And we are the ones called upon to show it.

<http://www.sermonsuite.com/free.php?i=788014099&key=fefdL3cMssxysf6i>

Amen.