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I'm amazed at how God has created our bodies as Holy Vessels, able to fight off illnesses, even while sleeping and without our control of the process. For example, if a virus invades my body, the immune system automatically begins creating antibodies to fight that virus. We have thousands of different kinds of antibodies within us, each one designed to protect against a certain invader.

Sometimes, however, we need a little bit of help through a vaccine, created with a weakened or partial form of the virus, mixed with ingredients to help preserve and stabilize the vaccine so it doesn't clump or stick to the sides of its container. By injecting the weakened form of the virus into our bodies, our immune system begins fighting it, preparing us for when we encounter the full virus.

I'm in awe of those who have figured out how to create a vaccine, beginning with the Chinese in 1000 CE who experimented with smallpox vaccines, which Edward Jennings perfected 800 years later. Small groups of people try the vaccine to be sure it's safe to use, then larger groups of people try it, which then leads to its approval.

The fastest this process has occurred was back in the 1960s when it took four years to create the mumps vaccine, which was speedy compared to the previous hundreds of years or decades the process took before.

As we have recently learned to map the structures of the basic building blocks of our body, called DNA and RNA, our ability to understand ourselves jumped forward with amazing speed, permitting us to create the COVID-19 vaccine in record-breaking time. If this virus had occurred just five years ago, we would not have had the technology back then to respond as quickly as we did this past year.<sup>1</sup>

It appears that God offers humanity insight at just the right time, from Edward Jennings noticing that milkmaids who had previously caught cowpox did not catch smallpox and thereby created the first successful vaccine,<sup>2</sup> to the many scientists who created the COVID-19 vaccine in less than a year.

Although Jesus lived before the era of vaccines, he knew something about healing, for when a man with a skin disease came to him relief, Jesus didn't seem to hesitate to help. The man said, "Jesus, if you want to, you can cleanse my skin."

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Jesus replied, “I do want to,” and Jesus touched him, and the man’s skin disease was gone. That’s even faster than the development of our recent vaccine!

Interestingly, Jesus told him to not tell anyone, but to go to the priest and give an offering, which was the common practice when someone wanted healing in those days. Jesus wasn’t offering healing for his own glorification, but because he wanted to help this man.

The unnamed man’s request may seem a bit odd to us, for why would the man wonder if Jesus wanted to heal him? At that time, no one understood the transmission of leprosy, believing it was contagious, so those with the skin disease had to live away from everyone else. He wasn’t allowed to worship with others in the sanctuary. No gathering with family or friends for social events. Even wearing a mask wouldn’t give him permission to gather with others, so it’s understandable that he might have felt that Jesus wouldn’t want to come near him either.

When illness enters our lives, our plans are interrupted, life disrupted, schedules thrown off, as

was the case when a Sunday school teacher who prepared her class for a guest visitor.

A minister promised to visit the kindergarten Sunday school class the following Sunday, so the teacher anxiously prepared. When the minister asked the children who created them, Jimmy was to say, “God made me.” The rest of the class was to sit quietly.

The big day came, and the minister paid his visit. He said, “Can anyone tell me who made us?” Silence. He repeated the question. Still there was silence.

Finally, a little girl raised her hand and said, “The boy that God made is sick today.”<sup>3</sup>

God created each one of us. No one is chosen as more special than anyone else. Jesus viewed even the man with leprosy, a dreaded skin disease, as a treasure. Someone worth healing. Others had ignored him, seeing him as someone to cast aside, not worth paying any attention to, as an old glass bottle thrown into the sea. Instead, Jesus saw this person as valuable, like sea glass once discarded that has had its rough edges smoothed by the ocean currents, creating something valuable and beautiful. Jesus viewed the man as a treasure worth healing, and even though Jesus asked him to not tell others about what had happened, how

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could this one healed not say anything? He was so filled with joy that he couldn't remain silent. He no longer took life for granted, for Jesus had not only restored his health, but his entire social order. In a sense, he had been given new life. He experienced resurrection from what must have felt like death!

I recall those times when I have been extremely ill, including my time with COVID, and each time I recover, I find myself even more grateful for life. Sometimes we take for granted our ability to breath, to walk, to eat. We may forget the treasures of the senses of eyesight and hearing and touch and taste. Those who have lost a sense know the feeling of loss, and yet, they often are able to compensate with other senses to still appreciate life. We are all treasures in the process of healing, God's imperfect creations, full of flaws and illness and sin, and yet, Holy Vessels, loved by God.

I don't believe that God sends illness into our lives. It's a natural part of the world, but God does not direct it toward anyone for punishment, though sometimes our bad choices may lead to poor health or injury. God always strives to bring about hope and healing, though sometimes the forces of this world are just too strong to overcome. But even in loss and illness, God offers the mysterious possibility of resurrection.

After a long year of waiting, of feeling isolated, of longing to be together again, we're beginning to see the possibilities for renewal, for health, for gathering safely in our communities of faith again. As we enter into this season of Lent, the six weeks leading us to Easter, we are beginning to get a glimpse of Easter, for as Holy Vessels, you already carry the Spirit of God within you, for you are a healing treasure, embraced by God.

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<sup>1</sup> See [www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03626-1](http://www.nature.com/articles/d41586-020-03626-1) and [www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-are-vaccines-developed](http://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/how-are-vaccines-developed) and [www.historyofvaccines.org/timeline/all](http://www.historyofvaccines.org/timeline/all)  
<sup>2</sup> [www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/smallpox-vaccines#:~:text=The%20smallpox%20vaccine%2C%20introduced%20by,protected%20against%20inoculated%20variola%20virus.](http://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/smallpox-vaccines#:~:text=The%20smallpox%20vaccine%2C%20introduced%20by,protected%20against%20inoculated%20variola%20virus.)

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<sup>3</sup> Hodgins, Michael. *1002 Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #69.