

1

Friday morning, I attended a breakfast held to thank those of us volunteers for being a Big Brother or Big Sister in Elkhart County. They had taken all the precautions about spacing the tables and seating only a few at each table, reminding us to wear masks when not eating. It's been a tough year, they reminded us, for all organizations, but it's been especially tough for those who agreed to meet as a Big Brother or Sister with a child who needs a friend. Doing activities or going on outings wasn't the same this year, due to the pandemic.

Many found creative ways to meet with their Little Sisters or Brothers, finding unique ways to remain connected in this strange time that we've found ourselves. It would have been so easy to give up, but as one speaker suggested, we serve as an inoculation of hope. By spending whatever time we can with these children, we inoculate them against loneliness and low self-esteem as we offer them hope for a better future.

That's a different way of thinking about healing, for healing involves more than physical healing from illness. On Wednesday evening, our virtual Soup 'n Soul group began naming the many kinds of healing we can experience in our lives: forgiveness, a chance to start over when we make a bad decision, the

reconciliation of a broken relationship. This year we've been so focused on the pandemic and physical healing that we may have missed all the other ways that healing occurs.

We all need healing of one kind or another, as in illustrated in a Peanuts cartoon where Lucy is yelling at Charlie Brown: "I don't care if I ever see you again! Do you hear me?" Linus walks over to Charlie Brown and says, "She really hurt your feelings, didn't she, Charlie Brown? I hope she didn't take all the life out of you." Charlie Brown responded: "No, not completely, but you can number me among the walking wounded!"¹

Many of us may feeling we're among the walking wounded, and when we begin to seek healing, we may not find it at first. We may have to open our eyes to see the healing around us, or maybe we need to seek healing in order to notice it, as was the case with a centurion who went seeking healing, not for himself, but for his servant.

Luke's Gospel tells us about this centurion, who was a leader in the Roman army in charge of a group of about 80 soldiers. One would receive the role of a centurion by election or promotion, a position that involved training of those under his command. Luke's story acknowledges this authority when the centurion noted that he tells soldiers

2

to go and come, and they do what he says. He's used to being in charge, giving orders, and having everyone obey.

Coming to Jesus for help would have been out of his comfort zone, for this centurion was used to telling everyone else what to do. But he faced something he could not control—the illness of his servant who was very near death.

When have you faced those times in life when you feel out of control? Maybe when your body that normally does what you ask it to do doesn't respond in the normal way, you may feel out of control.

Maybe when your finances usually seem to be enough suddenly become almost depleted, you may feel out of control.

Maybe when the technology you normally use suddenly gets an upgrade and you find yourself confused, you may feel out of control.

The centurion, this leader of a group of soldiers, felt out of control and began seeking healing for his servant. That he went to Jesus is unusual for several reasons. First, being a Roman centurion, he was probably not Jewish. For him to seek help from a Jewish teacher like Jesus was very unusual.

Second, he had great wealth, for Luke notes that the elders from the synagogue made the request for Jesus to see him since this Roman centurion had made donations to help build their synagogue in Capernaum.

When I visited Capernaum 14 years ago, I visited the ruins of a synagogue in that community. It wouldn't have been the same one the centurion helped build, for the ruins had been built over the rubble of another synagogue. I recalled taking a few pictures of that synagogue, which brought back memories of visiting that place. As I walked through the remains of the building, I wondered if the original synagogue in that location had been the one the centurion had funded. Had Jesus walked along the path to worship in this place? It was humbling to imagine that I was walking in the footsteps of those who had worshiped in that place, those who encouraged Jesus to heal the centurion's servant since he had helped build their place of worship.

And yet, even with all his wealth and power, he felt unworthy to approach Jesus. Have you ever felt as though Jesus may not want to pay attention to you?

A third reason that it's surprising that this military leader went to Jesus was that he was advocating for his servant. Not only was the Roman centurion on the fringe of this religious community, but the servant would surely

3

have been considered an outsider as well. One writer suggested that this servant would have been “the ultimate nobody,” and then the writer noted, “None of this matters to Jesus. Jesus came to bring salvation to everyone.”²

It seems as though Jesus is coloring outside the lines, bringing healing to those outside the traditional norms, even to the centurion who felt he was unworthy and his servant. I’ve thought about Jesus’ willingness to include everyone as I’ve listened to recent news stories about those getting COVID vaccinations. One report noted that “Clinics typically filled with Black and Latino residents are now brimming with older white adults from other areas eager to get the coveted COVID-19 vaccine.”³ Isn’t it interesting that people who normally would not visit those neighborhoods now flock there since it has something they want?

People of color often receive less access to health care, and the pandemic has underscored the problem. It could be due to not receiving the information, or it might be that they mistrust what they hear. Systems of racism that many of us do not even notice impact the health of people of color, and I imagine Jesus is saddened by this disparity.

One thing the pandemic has taught us, however, is that all of us are vulnerable. The virus can infect anyone, and for you and me to be healthy, everyone has to be healthy. Health is more than an individual issue, it’s an economic and social concern as well. Everyone is valuable, and Jesus seeks each one of us as a Beachcomber searches for treasure. Until everyone is healthy, all of us are at risk. When you find yourself seeking healing, let’s find a way to seek healing for everyone.

¹ Quoted in *Lord, Give Me Patience!* By James W. Moore and Bob J. Moore, p. 105.

² Notes from Marcia McFee with Worship Design Studio on *Holy Vessels* about the book *Healing in the Gospel of Matthew: Reflections on Method and Ministry*.

³ “What’s Race Got to Do with Getting Your COVID-19 Vaccine?” www.aarp.org/health/conditions-treatments/info-2021/racial-disparities-covid-vaccine.html