

**“Christian Healing as practiced and taught by the Episcopal Church”**

Sermon notes by the Rev. Arnold A. Bush, Priest in Charge, 1.22.2012

Episcopal Church of the Epiphany

These notes are for a later study, so keep them near your Bible or Book of Common Prayer.

Text: James 5:14-16. This chapter in James is one of several biblical references for the Sacraments of Unction for the Sick and Reconciliation of a Penitent (Sacrament of Forgiveness) *“Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church and pray over him and anoint him with oil in the name of the Lord. And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise him up. If he has sinned, he will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so you may be healed.”*

References in the *Book of Common Prayer* related to Ministration to the Sick, pp. 453-461 and Holy Unction as stated in the Catechism, p.861. Our Prayer Book and liturgies embody what the Episcopal Church believes and practices. The content has emerged out of much debate and discussion and two General Conventions made up of bishops, laity and clergy.

**I. Introduction: Our understanding about the Triune God**

Any statement about Christian Healing must start with our understanding of the God as revealed in Jesus Christ.

1. God’s will for us is wholeness. The root of the word “salvation” is “health.” His will for us is healing, wholeness, harmony, and *shalom*. “To redeem” means to restore what was broken, to bind back in place, to restore what was lost. Thus, in prayers for healing we do not need to ask the Father God, “If it is your will, would you restore, or heal him/her who is ill.” His will has been revealed that wholeness may be manifested. A prayer for “*if it is your will*” is a prayer for guidance or direction as Jesus prayed in the Garden Gethsemane before Good Friday.
2. Thus God is the Healer. He is the source of healing. He is the giver of health. As the healer he uses many means for healing: Medical science, pharmaceuticals, surgery, physical therapy, psychiatry, professional counseling, good nutrition and hygiene, reconciliation with those in conflict, exercise, prayer, Holy Communion, Unction, etc. We are not Christian Scientists nor like some Christian groups who do not believe in using modern medical practices.

**II. Healing is a matter of relationships**

1. In the Summary of the Law we see three relationships: *“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, mind, soul, and strength. And your neighbor as yourself.”* In this we see three relationships: WITH GOD, WITH OTHERS, AND WITH OURSELVES.
2. So healing is a matter of having healthy relationships. One of the church’s purposes is to assist others in coming into a saving, health-producing relationship with Christ. We are to be a people of prayer, making a vital connection to Jesus. A question in the *Rule of Life*, personal disciplines found in the Cursillo Movement is “What have I done to nurture my relationship with Christ?” In the 12 Steps, there is a similar step: “I am powerless, and I have turned my will over to a higher power.” (Of course, we understand this higher power is Jesus.) One of the mysteries I do not understand about healing is this: “Why do some have physical healing but do not have relationships healed?” Uncle so-and-so was healed of his emphysema, or diabetes, but he is still a grouchy, unforgiving old man. Or vice versa, Aunt Mary is the most loving, caring person in the congregation, but she still has that chronic disease.
3. Relationships and attitudes can cause physical illness: Often certain physical illnesses may be caused by certain attitudes such as, ulcers, rashes, heart complications, arthritis, and hypertension.
4. Wellness movement in our society: In the past 15 years many health insurance companies are now educating the persons they insure about wellness issues: nutrition, daily exercise, rest, days

off, leisure activities, misuse of alcohol and tobacco. Notice the media coverage of obesity in our culture and of schools changing their lunchrooms and snacks. The public use in the Episcopal Church of the Sacrament of Unction and Christian healing across Christendom had a renewal the latter half of the last century in mainline denominations.

Here are some examples of how a local parish can promote healing: Oil can be anointed publically, Laying on of Hands can be administered, prayer teams for healing can be formed, parish prayer lists can be made public (with appropriate discretion about medically specific information), lay pastoral care can become the norm of the parish. Episcopal clergy receive training in clinical pastoral care in hospitals and mental health institutions, and they always have oil for anointing the sick available.

From my observation, these and other techniques for promoting wellness in the Episcopal Church built momentum during the 1990s. Parish Wellness Teams, Health Teams, having a Parish Nurse as a staff member, and annual health fairs in parish halls all began to emerge within the life of many congregations. Before 1990, the clergy and lay leadership only offered a weekday or Sunday Eucharist with public laying on of hands for healing for the sick. Churches offered little or nothing on WELLNESS to challenge lifestyle changes and prevent illness and sickness.

### III. What we do not know about the process of healing

1. We do not know why some Christians are not physically or emotionally healed by praying or having others pray for them.
2. We do not know why all healing is not instant. Most healing seems to be a process.
3. We do not know how important a person's own personal faith is to the success of that person's healing. The role of personal faith in healing was often involved in the healing miracles of Jesus, but not in all the miracles. There is some disagreement in the Spiritual Healing literature that "one must generate more faith" in order for one to be healed by God. In some Christian circles the "personal faith of the individual" becomes a condition for God to love us or heal us. God is in the business of loving and healing us unconditionally. We do not need to put "if only's" for God to bring healing. In James 5 the "prayer of faith" could involve seeing wholeness for the person or God's will of wholeness being completed within that person; for example, seeing the child playing or going to school, or the parent functioning as a well parent.
4. We suspect but do not know whether some people actually need to be sick. (See Scott Peck's *The Road Less Traveled*). An example is the lame man at Solomon's Well in Jerusalem in John 5. Jesus asked the man, an invalid for 38 years, "Do you want to get well?" Is our illness sometimes a means to bring attention to ourselves so others will respond to us?
5. We do not know why some Christians have a gift of healing and others do not. Those with a spiritual gift of healing often pray in such a way that healing seems to take place. All Christians do not have the "gift of healing," but all are to have the role of interceding for healing for those ill or infirm.

### IV. Why the Sacrament of Unction during Sunday's public worship?

1. This Sunday I will administer the Sacrament of Unction out of obedience. This public Sacrament of Unction is not because of some vision or guidance where God said we should do this. Sacraments are means of grace, thus the sacrament should be administered when the congregation gathers corporately.
2. This sacrament needs to be brought out in the open within corporate Eucharistic worship. Having the Litany of Healing and Holy Unction as part of the prayers of the people tends to highlight the themes of wholeness and healing in the Eucharistic Liturgy. We are a sacramental church, so let us celebrate all the sacraments that Christ uses. Remember, however, that this does not mean Christ only acts in the ancient Church's Sacraments.
3. Here are a few of the references of healing miracles by Jesus and the early church:

- a. James 5, “...call on the elders of the church”
  - b. Matthew 28:19 “Go into all the world, make disciples, and teach. I will be with you always.”
  - c. Luke 24:47, “and repentance and forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name in all nations, beginning in Jerusalem.”...”stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high.”
  - d. Mark 16: 15,18 “Jesus said to them, ‘Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved... And these signs will accompany those who believe. In my name they will drive out demons... they will place their hands on sick people and they will get well.’”
  - e. Acts 3:6 “And Peter said to the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’”
  - f. Acts 19:11-12 - Paul in Ephesus, “God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, so that even handkerchiefs and aprons that had touched him were taken to the sick, and the illnesses were cured and the evil spirits left them.”
4. The rubrics in the Book of Common Prayer (page 453) state: *When the Laying on of Hands or Anointing takes place at a public celebration of the Eucharist, it is desirable that it precede the distribution of Holy Communion, and it is recommended that it take place immediately before the exchange of the Peace.* On page 456, we note this rubric: *“In cases of necessity, a deacon or lay person may perform the anointing, using oil blessed by a bishop or priest.”*

#### V. A commentary on the Ministration of the Sick Liturgy, pp 453-461.

- 453.1 *“In case of illness, the Minister of the Congregation is to be notified.”*
- 453.2 *“When LOH or Anointing takes place at a public celebration of the Eucharist...”*
- 453.3 Nine passages of Scripture are given dealing with healing.
- 454.1 *“The Priest may suggest the making of a special confession, if the sick person’s conscience is troubled, and use the form for Reconciliation of a penitent”*
- 455.1 Blessing of the oil: note “Giver of health and salvation”
- 455.2 Note: *“as your holy apostles anointed many that were sick and healed them, (scriptural basis)so may those who in faith and repentance receive this holy unction be made whole.”* (emphasis on wholeness)
- 456.1 Anointing in the Name of the Trinity, (“in the name” implies that all God’s attributes and character are to be associated with that person.)
- 456.2 “beseeching” the Lord is part of the prayer
- 456.3 Two prayers refer to *“driving away all sickness of body and spirit”* or *“May he deliver you from all evil.”* One does not have to believe there are “little demons” floating around that got into our minds or bodies. Rather, we are praying that if there is a cause for the illness, the Holy Spirit will remove it. One of the prayers on page 458 uses: *“that his/her weakness may be banished and his/her strength restored.”*
- 456.4 All three prayers include an outcome: *“to give you victory of life and peace which will enable you to serve him both now and evermore”...“to uphold you and fill you with his grace,”... “restore you to wholeness and strength...preserve you in all goodness, and bring you to everlasting life.”* When I am anointing persons at the communion rail, I use a combination of the phases included in these anointing prayers. The post-communion prayer on page 457 also includes, *“bring us forgiveness of our sins, strength in our weakness, and everlasting salvation.”*

#### VI. When you become ill do not neglect the following:

1. Pray for your own healing. God’s will is healing and wholeness. Some folks feel uneasy praying for themselves thinking this is “selfish.” I always ask, “Do you have any problem praying for yourself?”
2. Take a few moments to examine your conscience. We are to do this each day of our lives.

3. Make some offering to the Lord each day. The prayer of oblation is an offering of ourselves, our lives, and labors, in union with Christ, for the purposes of God. (BCP, 857)
4. Call on the elders of the Church. Ask for the prayers of the congregation. Come to the presbyters (priests) for Holy Unction.
5. See your physician for diagnostic and/or treatment purposes. Pray that God will equip your physicians and other health personnel to use the best means in modern medical practices for your healing. Healing is a partnership among medical, psychological, spiritual, relational, emotional parts of our life. God is working through all these areas.
6. Remove from your mind the “either/or” in the process of healing, such as “I’ll go to the doctor first and then start praying, or I’ll try prayer first then go to the doctor.” A complete medical diagnostic appraisal may give you a better way to focus your prayers.

#### VII. Areas related to healing that need mature understanding and a theological and biblical perspective

1. A biblical (1<sup>st</sup> century) understanding of demonology and its relationship to healing. Know the difference between spiritual forces in a “closed world view” (Aristotelian perspective) and an “open world view” (Platonic or Jungian perspective). We need to understand exorcism in a psychiatric perspective and in modern practice. (See Scott Peck’s *People of the Lie*.) We must overcome the dualism communicated in the motion pictures and media that the world is equally divided between “Evil Powers and Godly Powers.” Many movies suggest that “evil” may win over the power of God in Christ. These “evil powers” were defeated on Good Friday.
2. The importance of poor public health practices such as an open sewerage, radiation, no purified drinking water, poor ventilation, and unhealthy working environments in promoting disease. These are found not only in many undeveloped countries but also in some parts of United States, even right here in central Alabama.
3. The role of addictions like alcoholism, drug addictions, eating disorders, sexual addictions, toxic faith, “rageiholism,” etc. in causing or complicating health problems. Addictions tend to become behaviors that medicate “one’s pain.”
4. The role of INTERCESSION... How can we help God in our prayers? Intercession is an expression of our compassion. Jesus’ healing was an expression of his compassion. Intercession is bringing before God the needs of others that God’s will may be completed. (BCP, 857) A helpful theological understanding of intercession is this: God’s business of redemption is bringing wholeness to human beings. By interceding we are cooperating with God’s redemptive process within the created order. There are many images one may adopt in offering intercessions. These methods may be taught in a class or a seminar on Prayer.
5. Motives for experiencing good health: Good health can be a means enabling one to do effective ministry in accomplishing God purposes. Remember, persons with chronic illness can also serve God in their limited circumstances. What is our motive to be in good health? To be used by the Holy Spirit! Let us not frequent the local “GYM” to “feel good or look good” to continue on a self-centered lifestyle or to live a selfish life. We want to keep healthy so we can extend our years in ministry that honors the Lord.