

## THE HEALING POWER OF PRAYER

St. Luke's Day is October 18, when the church remembers St. Luke the Evangelist. Luke, a historian, was the author of two books of the bible, namely the Gospel account of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles. He accompanied Paul on missionary journeys. Luke was a doctor, in the bible he is described as "the beloved physician." Traditionally he is identified with the church's ministry of healing. With this in mind I would like to share some thoughts on the healing power of prayer and the church's ministry of prayer.

There is so much sickness, injury and hurt that afflicts people. Most everyone knows someone, maybe a friend or a family member, who is seriously ill. Perhaps we ourselves are experiencing health problems.

There are more people than we are aware of who are lonely and depressed. Every time we turn around we see the pain of broken relationships in people's lives.

We bear scars and damaging memories from times in the past when we have been wounded or injured. The painful memories may reach all the way back to school days, to childhood.

In our day and age it is such a common practice for people to turn to doctors and psychologists for cures that we hardly pay attention to it. People spend time in clinics and hospitals and buy all sorts of medicine. We consider all of this just part of staying healthy.

Yet there is more. Scientific studies have shown that prayer makes a difference in people's health. When patients are prayed for they have a better recovery rate than people who are not. When a person practices prayer, their overall health is better.

**Prayer can be the beginning of the journey towards wholeness rather than a last resort.** Too often prayer is seen as the only thing that is left when all else has failed.

I remember the first time my medical doctor prayed with me and for me during an office visit. Prayer was added to diagnoses, therapy and medicine. That day my health care could not have gotten any better.

God does not will pain, sickness or suffering. It is God's intention for people to be whole in body, mind and spirit.

This was evident in Jesus' earthly ministry; he performed many different acts of healing.

*When the sun was setting, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of sickness, and laying hands on each one, he healed them.*

*(Luke 4:40)*

At Jesus command his disciples continued a ministry of healing which included the laying on of hands and the anointing with oil of those who fell ill.

*Jesus called to him his twelve disciples and gave them the authority over unclean spirits to cast them out, and to heal every disease and every infirmity. These twelve he sent out, charging them, "Preach as you go, saying, "The Kingdom of heaven is at hand." Heal the sick." They went out and preached that people should repent. They drove out many demons and anointed many sick people with oil and healed them.*

*(Matt. 10:1, 5, 7-8a; Mark 6:12-13)*

The Church has continued these practices as a part of ministry in Christ's name.

*Is any one of you sick? He should call the elders of the church to 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 so that you may be healed.*

*(James 5:14-16a)*

(Commentary from the Lutheran book of Occasional Services)

If one is a member of a congregation, then make your health needs known so that the community of the church can pray for you. If one is not part of a faith community, speak to friends or neighbors who are, let them request prayers on your behalf

The church will pray for those who desire prayer. The church will pray for those who are ill in body, distressed in mind or troubled in spirit. In a sense, the prayers become the stretchers that bear people into the loving presence of Christ.

It is important to understand that answers to prayer depend on God's will. God may heal with a divine touch or God may work through physicians and surgeons, through therapists and counselors. Healing may come quickly or it may be gradual.

Concerning God's will it is important to remember that God does not desire that people should be sick and broken in body, mind or spirit.

As a pastor there has been times when I have stood at the bedside of the sick and the dying and they have cried out, "what did I do that was so bad that God is punishing me with this".

God does not send sickness as punishment for sin. Jesus reveals this to us clearly. In John chapter 9 there is the story of a man born blind. Jesus' disciples ask him, "who sinned, this man or his parents that he was born blind." Jesus tells them explicitly that the blindness is not due to sin and then Jesus demonstrates God's glory by healing the blind man with the gift of sight.

Also there is no instance in the gospel accounts where Jesus refused to heal someone because he felt illness would strengthen their character.

When it comes to prayer Christians pray believing that God will hear our prayers. It would not be right though, to say that there are not disappointments when we pray for healing. The Apostle Paul prayed for his own physical healing and it did not come about, but he prayed for other people and they were healed.

Faith is not about having prayer answered exactly in the way that I want it to be. Rather faith allows God to have God's way. Faith means that Christians

say , “God hears my prayers, God will act, God will have my welfare in mind, God will reveal his love for me, God will enable me to receive the answer that is given”

Prayer is not always easy. People will struggle with prayer, just like the man in the bible who cried out for healing, saying, “Lord I believe, help my unbelief.” (Mark 9:24)

One of my favorite prayers for healing is the words from a song that goes like this.

Healer of our every ill, light of each tomorrow,  
give us peace beyond our fear, and hope beyond our sorrow.  
(Text, Marty Haugen)

There is so much more that could be said about prayer, healing and wholeness but there is not enough space in one brief article. I would like to close by sharing with you the prayer appointed for the Festival of St. Luke, October 18.

*Almighty God, you inspired your  
servant Luke the physician to reveal  
in his Gospel the love and healing  
power of your Son. Give your  
Church the same love and power to  
heal, to the glory of your name;  
through you Son, Jesus Christ our  
Lord, who lives and reigns with you  
and the Holy Spirit, one God, now  
and forever.*

Theodore I. Bessey