

*God grant us the courage and the wisdom and the strength to always seek the truth,
come whence it may, cost what it will. AMEN.*

“Start with Jesus.” That was the advice I received this week from a wise man with whom I shared the challenges of preparing this very sermon. I think I will take his advice.

In the gospel of Mark this morning, after Jesus had fed thousands of people, he is approached by a Syrophenician woman who argues the privileges of dogs to get Jesus to heal her daughter. Jesus was worn out. He was caught with his compassion down. At first he didn't react the way we thought he would. He wanted to keep going and ignore these outcasts. After all, the woman was from the wrong side of the tracks. But Jesus broke down those barriers and healed her daughter.

Jesus thought he might get a break, but another large group of people tracked Jesus down and brought a deaf man to him. By this time Jesus had to have been pretty tired of all of these crowds, and healing one more person was probably the last thing he wanted to do. The deaf man was looked down upon because he was sick. Society figured that he must have done something immoral if he was in that bad a shape. But his few close friends decided they would persevere on his behalf. And Jesus took the time to talk to him, and he was healed.

Jesus didn't have to entertain conversation with these strangers. He had the power just to look at them and heal them. Perhaps that would have been the quick band-aid approach. Slap it on and move on to the next town. But if he had just done that, I wonder if those people's lives would have really been changed. I wonder if the conversation and the words Jesus said and his presence didn't do just as much healing as the touch of his hands on the man's ears and tongue.

So how do these stories apply to our lives today? Well, I've tried all week to find a way to keep from bringing up the issue of health care reform in our country, but I can't get around it. I can't keep from bringing up this challenge because I think it is our problem. I think it is a moral problem because I think the fact that there are some 47 to 50 million people without health care in our country grieves the very heart of God. It has to because everywhere in scripture God takes the side of the poor and the oppressed. The writer of Proverbs says that “the LORD pleads the cause of the poor and despoils of life those who despoil them.” James says that God has chosen the poor in the world to be rich in faith and to be heirs of the kingdom. Providing health care for every American is a Christian cause because we have been given the command to love our neighbors as ourselves.

I tried to get out of talking about reforming health care because the conversation in our country has not brought out the best in us. In town hall meetings across the country, what were to be civil conversations have turned into screaming matches. In one instance a man bit off the pinky finger of another man in a fight that broke out in the midst of the meeting. We can do better.

Now please hear me. I do not have a solution, and I am not advocating any side of the battle that has been formed. Like most of you I have not even taken the time to read the fine print of lengthy bills that have been proposed in Congress. But make no mistake about it; I think we have to start with Jesus. And I firmly believe that whatever the solution is, we are a part of it. We must put our faith into action in providing adequate healthcare to all Americans. We have taken a band aid solution for far too long, and in the process people continue to hurt and to die. If we don't go back and open up the wound and clean up the real source of the pain, then we can never be healed. We have to allow ourselves to be opened and to be changed. Opening up the wound hurts, it stings as you rip the band-aid off. But that's when the healing really begins, when we find the source of the pain and are willing to look at it and be open to the possibility of being changed.

“In [the year] AD 251, a plague broke out in the Roman Empire. It was believed that an average of 5,000 people per day died of this disease ([Wikipedia](#)). Cyprian, a bishop of Carthage (a city in present-day

Tunisia), wrote a [treatise](#) about the kingdom of God that inspired Carthaginian Christians to take it upon themselves to care for the sick and dead.

“They didn’t lobby the pagan government or solicit aid from the shopkeeper guilds. They didn’t ask for a bailout or even build subsidized shelters. They -- followers of Jesus from all class distinctions and professions [heeded Cyprian’s call](#) by taking the hurting into their homes, personally tending to the sick, giving money out of their own pockets to relieve a person’s suffering, and showing love to those who had previously been their persecutors.

“Talk about a creative approach to health care.”ⁱ

Church history is full of examples of such wildly creative displays of faith and action. Just look at our list of saints and martyrs. So why can’t another rag-tag group of faithful people like us who are radically in love with Jesus do the same thing now?

“In ancient Constantinople, there was a sixth-century version of Patch Adams. An Eastern Orthodox saint named [Sampson the Hospitable](#) turned his home into a free clinic where people could receive food, lodging and medicine. After gaining favor with the emperor by healing an illness of his, Sampson was able to open a hospital for the poor that lasted for over 600 years.”ⁱⁱ

So now it must be our turn. Turning our very homes into hospitals may not be a realistic solution, but we must cast out the demons within that tempt us to remain silent and complacent. We must stop using the labels that align us with one party or another and realize that what we all have in common, rich or poor is that the Lord is the maker of us all. We must unstop our own ears and truly listen to one another, open to the possibility that we might change our mind.

And then we must speak openly and plainly to power. Even if Jesus does tell us to keep quiet about his power and strength, we must be like that crowd and proclaim our goals all the more zealously. The gospel this morning is about Jesus healing a little girl and a deaf man, but it is also about the people that advocated for their needs. Those people knew that just a crumb of Jesus’ power could change lives. And if a word from an outsider can change the mind of Jesus, and if a word from Jesus can heal the broken, then as disciples of Jesus, our words can change our country and the world forever.

Jesus is calling us this morning to really open up our lives and open up our minds and talk to one another. And talking is not a one way street. Talking requires listening. Talking requires undivided attention to hear what the other person is trying to say to us. Talking involves asking questions and being willing to hear answers that might just change and heal you inside and out. And hearing requires being open to the grace that you just might find in the conversation.

This morning at the 11:15am service we will welcome one month old Alexandra Elizabeth Pawelchak into the household of God. As we renew our baptismal vows with Lexi, we will say that we will seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving our neighbors as ourselves. We promise to strive for justice and peace among all people, and respect the dignity of every human being. The best way to teach Lexi those virtues is by example. And in doing that, perhaps we will prepare an even better world for her to experience as she grows in the knowledge and love of Christ. For in this household of God, we take care of each other with the abundant help and grace of God.

So where is that grace? The grace is in the hands of Jesus as he reaches out to touch us and make us whole. He is the one whose healing lasts forever. And the grace is in the crowd that constantly brings us back to the source of healing. The grace is found in the crowd sitting in the pews right next to you as we worship and sing and pray and support each other in our lives in Christ.

Surely in this very Christian community, like the crowd in Mark, we are astounded everyday beyond measure. Jesus has done everything well, and we know that one day we will be perfectly restored in him. The more we experience the grace we find here, the more zealously we want to proclaim it. All we must remember to do is start with Jesus. Amen.

ⁱ **A Christian Response to Health Care in America** Posted in Faith Issues by Jeff Goins on 9/1/2009
<http://jeffgoins.myadventures.org/?filename=a-christian-response-to-health-care-in-america>

ⁱⁱ *Ibid.*