

Anointed

Meditation – Psalm 23

Morning Prayer (10.2.11)

In a few moments, you will be invited to participate in a short service of healing and wholeness where we will pray and where I will anoint your head with oil.

The scripture we just sang together, the 23rd Psalm, evokes the image of God anointing our heads with oil...of God filling our cups to overflowing...of God restoring our souls. It is the language of healing and wholeness. The Psalm uses the metaphor of God as a Shepherd...one that is repeated many times in scripture (Jesus said that he was the Good Shepherd, cf. John 10). A shepherd is one who guides the sheep in ways that lead to provision, to safety, to rest...to wholeness.

So why is that I am often at a loss when it comes to needing or granting God's healing and wholeness? I doubt if I am the only one. As a church, we used to do services of healing and wholeness a few times a year. Bryan would lead them here in the chapel. We stopped doing them a few years ago because of a lack of interest.

It is because we don't think we need healing? It is because we look elsewhere to find our wholeness? It is because we are too sophisticated to believe that God can grant the things that God promises?

The preacher Fred Craddock tells a story about a time when he was a professor at Candler School of Theology in Atlanta, Georgia. He was up in his study, reading. His secretary interrupted him to let him know that a couple had arrived and were looking for a minister. A young woman met him in the parking lot. She opened the back door of the car to show him her husband who had been in a bad car accident and in a coma for eight months. The young woman had quit her job to take care of him and their resources were almost gone.

She looked at Dr. Craddock and said, "I'd like for you to heal him." To which Fred replied, "I can pray for him. And I can pray with you. But I do not have the gift of healing."

Frustrated, the woman got behind the wheel of the car and said to Dr. Craddock, “Then what in the world do you do?” and she drove off.

Craddock ends the story by saying, “What I did that afternoon was study, stare at my books, and try to forget what she had said.”¹

When I push myself, my discomfort with the language of healing and wholeness has to do with a failure to embrace what I cannot understand. That, and a failure to admit that I am broken and in need of help.

As we all are.

I have recited the 23rd Psalm at the bedside of many a person who were crossing that mysterious space between life and death. In fact, I did so this past week.

The words ring true in those moments:

The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me; they rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

Thou anointest my head with oil...my cup runneth over.

Would that we accept and embrace the healing and wholeness that God offers us in this life, and not simply the next.

The healing and wholeness that we all need – and that is freely offered in the love and grace of Jesus Christ our Lord.

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¹ Craddock, Fred, *Craddock Stories*, Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2001, p. 21