

The Faith of a Few Good Friends..., Sermon for July 12 – (based on VBS lesson)

July 12, 2020

Opening Prayer +

Steve and Annie Chapman sing a song that includes these lines:

They took that man to Jesus;
He had no faith of his own,
But when Jesus saw **the faith of a few good friends**,
He said, "Take up your bed, take up your bed and go home.

The faith of a few good friends. Let's look for a minute at the relationship between faith and healing in the Gospels. We have absolutely no reference to any faith on the part of the paralyzed man; the song is true to the Gospel. However, for his four friends to make such an extraordinary effort, even removing the roof of the house when the doorway was blocked by Jesus' many admirers, their faith in Jesus' ability to heal their friend through the power of God was made clear.

Is it our faith something that allows God to heal us? To heal our loved ones? If someone we have prayed for isn't healed, does that mean we just didn't have "enough faith" or "the right kind of faith?" I am sure you have all prayed for someone and your prayer has not appeared to be answered. However, if we look at all of Jesus' healing miracles, faith does come into play. For instance, he was unable to perform physical cures in his home town of Nazareth, **because people there had known him since childhood and saw him through a lens that filtered out the wonder of God's presence in him.** What faith does is open the door for God's healing power. Faith recognizes God's ability to grant the request, in our time and in Jesus' time, and that is the faith that opens the door for the paralyzed man. His faith? No. The faith of his friends.

In the movie, *The Green Mile*, based on Stephen King's gripping novel, Paul Edgecomb is a 44-year-old prison guard at the Louisiana State Prison. Paul is the head of Death Row. He is a very solid, down-to-earth sort of guy. It's 1935, and Death Row -- or "the Green Mile," as they have nicknamed it -- has just received a new prisoner. He is an absolutely enormous African American man named John Coffey, who has been convicted of raping and murdering two little girls. He is what used to be referred to as "simple-minded;" he is afraid of the dark and sometimes cries in his bunk. As Paul and the other Death Row guards come to know John Coffey, they find little to fear in this huge, gentle, childlike person.

Paul Edgecomb is ill when we first meet him and John Coffey in the movie, very sick with a raging infection, and too stubborn to go to the doctor. John Coffey lays hands on him through the bars of his cell and Paul's infection is miraculously cured. Paul tells no one but his wife, but after John Coffey has brought the dead pet mouse of another inmate back to life, Paul shares his story with his fellow guards.

The lovely and beloved wife of their warden, Hal Moores, is in the midst of an excruciating death from inoperable brain cancer, and the men make plans to take John Coffey from Death Row to her home in the middle of the night. They do not tell the warden, because, as Paul says, "Hal won't believe in anything." So there's no faith on the part of the family. However, these four men, in a graphic re-run of today's Gospel story, load John Coffey into a truck and take him to the suffering woman, Melinda. He heals her, of course; this is, after all, a movie about Jesus in some sense. But the point is that **the four men had so much faith in their recognition of John Coffey as the channel for God's healing power that they enabled the opportunity for her healing.**

That's all any of us do, really. *We facilitate the opportunity for healing.* When we bring someone we love to our Lord in prayer, does that mean there will be a physical cure, as in this case? Not necessarily; but there will be healing. Healing of deep inner woundedness, relief of

pain, healing of broken relationships, healing of sin. The blessed relief of the heart when one comes to the knowledge that one's slate has, indeed, been **wiped clean** by the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ. The other part of this is that God chooses **WHEN** that healing will occur – **NOT ME**. The healing of one another's pain, illness, and, yes, sin. That's the other piece in this story - the forgiveness of sin.

It's interesting that some folks can live out their lives in blissful ignorance of their own sinfulness. I remember a story about a young woman who applied for campus housing on a college campus. In those days freshmen students were required to live on campus. However, in talking to her, the school found out that her father had always told her, "If you want something, just take it. Most of the time you won't get caught." There are folks who have been raised to have **no sense of right and wrong**, no knowledge of the commandments of God; **no conscience**. How can the college, in good conscience, allow this young woman, who readily admits to being a thief, to live with roommates who have no knowledge of this risk?

So, you see, a guilty conscience is -- within healthy limits -- a gift from God. Our conscience tells us that **we are falling short of what God dreams for us**. Our *conscience* pinches us when we abuse alcohol or drugs or cigarettes, or when we overeat and do not exercise, the things that cause our earthly bodies to deteriorate and become useless before their natural life span. As Paul tells us, our bodies are not our own; they have been **bought** at a price, and they are **temples** for the Holy Spirit.

Our conscience nags us when we have been unforgiving, or when we have knowingly hurt another. Our conscience is a tremendous **gift**, reminding us when we've fallen short of our Creator's dream for our lives.

However, a guilty conscience that receives no relief can, indeed, paralyze us. We can find ourselves unable to move out of sinful behavior, unable to feel worthy or adequate to move ahead in our lives. We can become lonely and isolated, unable to reach out to others, and

unable to see the light for all the darkness that crowds in around our minds, hearts, and spirits. Depression has become a national epidemic in the United States -- clinical, pathological depression. When we become depressed, we are centered on ourselves, on our own unhappiness, our own hopelessness. Normal periodic or reactive unhappiness deepens into depression, and we lose all love for life, all joy for living. A recent clinical psychiatric study showed that nearly 90% of situational depression is **guilt-related** -- some appropriate, some inappropriate. Guilt over real sin, yes, but also **guilt over a failure to achieve goals, a failure to achieve by the world's standards, a failure of relationship.** This is paralyzing, isn't it?

What is our answer? Just as the song suggests, just as the movie's theme indicates, just as the message in today's Gospel shows us: **We take ourselves and those we love to Jesus**, God can and will bless us and those we bring to him in prayer with grace that releases us from paralysis and frees us to change our lives, to live in health and wholeness, to serve joyfully all the days of our life!

So remember to pray for those you know who need God's healing power – physical, emotional, psychological, - Our Lord knows what to do, even if we don't.

In the name of God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.