

Sermon 101616 Faith
Scripture Luke 17: 11-19
Sermon Title Sustaining Faith

In our gospel lesson this morning, we hear one of many stories in which Jesus heals sick people. In this story, he heals ten people with leprosy but only one returns to Jesus to show thanksgiving. Jesus says, "Rise and go; your faith has made you well." (LK 17: 19)

This idea makes the curious wonder. Is that possible? Can someone's faith in God, in Jesus, really make them well? The answer in Scripture is, "Yes." Well, how about today, in real life, can someone's faith heal them? Well, my experience as Pastor of Union Church is also, "Yes." Now, I have gone to each of the people I will be speaking of and gotten their permission to talk about them here. I would like to point to real life examples of people that most of us know who have done just that; used their faith to sustain them in times of difficulty and crisis.

Our church Treasurer and overall church honcho, Howard Martin, landed in hospital last year on Thanksgiving morning. He had fluid around his heart and blood clots in his lungs. The various procedures and drugs used to deal with his situation opened up one problem after another. He was in and out of hospitals from November to April. It is not an exaggeration to say that he was near death on more than one occasion. When Howard was out and we saw him during that time, he wore a fairly good size wooden cross around his neck. I didn't speak to

him about it, but I interpreted that as, 'This is how I'm approaching this crisis in my life.' This is sustaining faith. Granted, some great docs, nurses, drugs family and friends, contributed greatly to his recovery, but I'm willing to bet that he wouldn't be the healthy man he is now without his faith.

Our church historian, trustee, and white haired father of Union Church, Roy Auguston also skirted death in amazingly almost the exact same time frame as Howard. It was the day before Thanksgiving that Roy had surgery to unblock two major arteries coming from the heart. He too was in and out of hospitals and we didn't see him back in church for good until April. It was Christmas eve, five PM worship that I asked him how he was feeling. He said, "Lousy." I was not surprised that he said that because he looked like crap.

He was in hospital later that night and had surgery at Beth Israel in Boston the day after Christmas. Now, this amazed me still, they wanted to make sure the surgery took, so they kept him open for two weeks. Finally, they were satisfied and closed him up. I remember going to see him during that time. He was in ICU with big tubes going down his throat, monitors all around him flashing and beeping. The only thing that told me that it was Roy was the white hair. He too was close to death on more than one occasion.

Now you can pass judgement on me if you'd like at what I'm about to tell you. I pray the minority of the time when I visit people in hospitals. I may be the only Pastor to approach hospital visits like that. What I try to do is get people laughing. I usually manage to do that. I find that if they laugh, it at least for the moment, they get their minds off of whatever they are going through.

Roy is the one person, and this is also true of his family, who would never let me leave without a prayer. As you may know, Roy works at a funeral home. He will tell you that he had lots of priests and ministers praying for him as they would always ask for him when he was out.

Again, Roy had the benefit of great docs, nurses, and drugs to get him through the ordeal, but there is no doubt that he would not be the healthy man he is today without the prayers of family, friends, and all of us. Sustaining faith.

Beverly Mitchell, is relatively new to Union Church. I had the pleasure of presiding when she joined the church. Bev was diagnosed with cancer. She was treated by Dana Farber Cancer Institute, about as good as it gets in terms of treatment. She had a series of chemotherapy sessions each of which was five straight days of 24/7 treatment. Before the treatments started, the docs told her that she had a minority chance of survival.

The first round of treatments brought on such severe side effects that she contemplated discontinuing the treatments. Between her family imploring her to continue and the docs adjusting the meds, she continued. I am very much aware that folks have an allergic reaction to driving to and in Boston. I have no such problem. I was born in Boston and have traveled there my whole life. I know that I will be one of a few, if any people, to visit when someone is in a Boston Hospital.

I messed up once, and didn't make it in, but the other sessions I visited with Bev. I would stay for an hour or so. You can get to know someone pretty well under those circumstances. I heard her story, learned of her family, and we of course spoke of life and death.

Bev had much to live for, particularly her grandchildren, to whom she wrote to during her treatments. That said, I was so struck by what peace and serenity Bev had at the very real prospect of impending death.

To me, there is a big difference between curing and healing. Even though stories like today's gospel lesson speak of people being cured by Jesus, the Bible only speaks of Jesus' healing ministry. Curing has to do with fixing a physical ailment. Healing has to do with getting right with the world, balancing your accounts with the world, the people in it, yourself, and your God. Bev was healed during those treatments.

Then she was cured. She was declared cancer free. After being diagnosed with a minority chance of survival, she beat the cancer. Again, it wouldn't have happened without great docs, nurses, and drugs. She had a luncheon a few weeks ago for all the folks who supported her during the cancer time. She was so cute bouncing around hugging folks. I have seen very few people so happy. Bev, you had the support of family and friends but you are here today mostly because of your grit and faith in God. Sustaining faith.

You all know where I'm going next. Jamie Riordon is a Deacon, choir angel, and Stephan Minister. I know that you know what I'm saying when I say that Jamie holds a unique place in the hearts and minds of the folks at Union Church. There is no one quite like her.

I first met Jamie, after I was called here and before I actually started as Pastor. We were at a store in Abington called Eclectic Collections, which is owned and operated by Meg's brother Howard. Jamie, recognized me and struck up conversation. She told me at the time that she was recovering from uterus cancer. Meg was there and I told Jamie about Meg being a cancer survivor.

It was clear to both Meg and me immediately that Jamie had strength of character and an inner peace that was palpable. Jamie got into our hearts at that point and she is still very much there. That was over three years ago, and Jamie is still fighting cancer. It cropped up in

her lungs and brain and lungs again. She has had surgeries, chemotherapy, and radiation. She is still not out of the woods. I am going to start calling her Kitty as she seems to have nine lives.

Like Bev, Jamie does not want to die but she is not afraid to die. If you ask her why, without hesitation, she will talk about her faith. Again, great medical professionals are at work with Jamie, but there is more. It is her family, friends, church and herself. More than anything, it is her sustaining faith.

Now, I am not here to tell you that if you have faith it will keep you alive. Everyone dies eventually, including the faithful and those without faith. What I'm suggesting is that faith changes one's approach to difficulty. In some ways, strong faith cannot be shaken because it is the result of having been shaken.

Overcoming difficulty builds faith and faith enables us to overcome difficulty. The New Testament letter to the Hebrews says, "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see." (Heb 11: 1)

Faith is less about beliefs and more about what is in the heart. I wish I could say, 'If you want to have faith think or do this.' But I can't. Faith has to do with hope but it is hard to say how it does. Saint Thomas Aquinas said, "Faith has to do with things that are not seen,

and hope with things that are not in hand.” I’m not really sure what that means but it sounds good.

This I can tell you. God is there for you. Jesus is there for you. You build on that relationship by bring God into your life. You have a problem at work? Try prayer. You have a relationship issue? Try prayer. Build your relationship with Jesus, with God. You will build a reservoir of strength and faith that will sustain you when something really bad happens. Faith comes from building a relationship with the Lord. Each of us has to do that for ourselves.

We are fortunate to have the four loved ones that I have spoken of today with us. Let us use them as examples, as beacons, to inspire each of us toward strong, rich and deep faith. God knows, we will need it. AMEN