



# “Your Faith Has Made You Well”: Healing and Salvation in Luke 17:12-19

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As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, “Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!” When he saw them, he said to them, “Go and show yourselves to the priests.” And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan. Then Jesus asked, “Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?” Then he said to him, “Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.” (Luke 17:12-19)

**I**N ZIMBABWE, PEOPLE SPEAK OF THE “THREE-LEGGED STOOL” BUILT BY THE Church of Sweden Mission: preaching points, schools, and clinics. The work corresponds to the threefold ministry of Jesus described in the New Testament:

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*All ten lepers in Luke 17 are cured of their disease, but only one is pronounced “well.” Although the gift to the nine is real, the one – the outcast Samaritan – encounters God in Jesus’ healing ministry and emerges with a full healing that goes beyond the cure experienced by the nine.*

preaching, teaching, and healing (Matt 4:23).<sup>1</sup> While the gospel of forgiveness was the foundation of all the mission's work, like its Lord it recognized the people's need also for teaching and healing.

In the Gospel of Luke, we find Jesus responding to needs in a variety of ways. To the woman with the alabaster jar, "who was a sinner," Jesus said, "Your sins are forgiven....Your faith has saved you" (Luke 7:36-50). The Samaritan leper, though, wanted something else—to be free of leprosy. And to him Jesus said, "Your faith has made you well" (Luke 17:19). In Luke's Gospel, of course, Jesus says the same thing to both of them: "ἡ πίστις σου σέσωκέν σε." What does this mean? Why is σέσωκέν sometimes translated "saved" and sometimes "made well"?<sup>2</sup>

### I. HEALING AND CURE

To understand the relation between healing and salvation, as depicted by Luke, we will need to consider another distinction, one made often these days in both medical and popular literature, the distinction between healing and cure. As clearly as anywhere, this was spelled out thirteen years ago by Richard E. YaDeau in the pages of this journal:

Recognizing, then, that the triune being [the human] is composed of a physical entity, a psycho-social entity, and a spiritual entity, curing becomes that endeavor which rectifies a disease or a disorder in one component of the triune being, while healing addresses the integration of these three components into a single entity, and is independent of the extent to which an individual's physical body is cured.<sup>3</sup>

To this technical description we can add, almost at will, more experiential ones, some of them remarkably compelling in their personal and literary power.

Nancy Mairs, reflecting on her experience with multiple sclerosis, recognizes that, though she was not being cured (i.e., freed from her limp, which is what she actually wanted when she prayed, "God, God, God, please heal me!"), she was, in fact, being healed, "made whole"—a process "which might entail collecting scattered fragments and painstakingly fitting and gluing them into place." "Since 'cure' and 'heal' can be used interchangeably, I didn't reflect before making my choice." She does not understand, she says, how a "relentless degeneration of my central nervous system can function to 'heal' me." But "Why not? I wondered then. I still do."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Hugo Söderström, *God Gave Growth: The History of the Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, 1903-1980* (Gweru, Zimbabwe: Lutheran Church in Zimbabwe, 1984) 48.

<sup>2</sup>On the meaning of salvation in relation to healing, see: Terence E. Fretheim, "Salvation in the Bible vs. Salvation in the Church," *Word & World* 13/4 (1993) 363-372; Donald E. Gowan, "Salvation as Healing," *Ex Auditu* 5 (1989) 1-19; Theodore Peters, "Wholeness in Salvation and Healing," *Lutheran Quarterly* 5/3 (1991) 297-314; Mark Allan Powell, "Salvation in Luke-Acts," *Word & World* 12/1 (1992) 5-10; Claus Westermann, "Salvation and Healing in the Community: The Old Testament Understanding," *International Review of Mission* 61/241 (1972) 8-19.

<sup>3</sup>Richard E. YaDeau, "Healing," *Word & World* 2/4 (1982) 317.

<sup>4</sup>Nancy Mairs, *Ordinary Time: Cycles in Marriage, Faith, and Renewal* (Boston: Beacon, 1993) 178.

Tony Hillerman, a recognized observer of Native American life in the southwest, makes a similar distinction:

From the tiny speaker of the tiny recorder Chee was hearing the same chant. Talking God summoning the *yei* to the Naakhai ceremony on the final night of the Yeibichai, calling them for the ritual which would heal Mrs. Agnes Tsosie and restore her to harmony. Not cure her, because Agnes Tsosie was dying of liver cancer. But heal her, return her to *hozro*, to harmony with her fate.<sup>5</sup>

These writers describe something real and profound, something no doubt essential to any contemporary talk of healing.

Often, this understanding of healing (rather than “mere” cure) is related in one way or another to the present interest in holism (or, to use YaDeau’s term, “integration”), an interest that deliberately sets itself over against the kind of differentiated view of the world and of the human being that is the hallmark of enlightenment thought.<sup>6</sup> Often this holistic view of healing seeks religious connections; just as Hillerman related healing to Navajo *hozro*, others seek connections with what the Bible calls shalom (שָׁלוֹם) or being “well” (σέσωκέιν).<sup>7</sup>

## II. HEALING ACCORDING TO LUKE

So far, so good. All of us have been exposed to enough instances of modern medicine’s depersonalization of the patient (ourselves or our loved ones or our parishioners) to see a genuine need for a return (advance?) to a concern for the whole person. At the same time, no view of healing based in biblical theology dare turn a proper concern for the whole person into some kind of nostalgic aspiration to live in a pre-enlightenment world with pre-enlightenment medical practices. The Swedish mission in Zimbabwe, for example, recognized in a 1960 statement that a Christian and biblical concern for healing would make use of the best medical service available.

All care of the sick must be of first class medical standard (expertise) which presupposes central hospitals and well equipped medical institutions.<sup>8</sup>

But, alongside this needed and welcome first-class medical care, is there still a place in a mission church for more traditional healing practices? Is there still a place in an established church for particular ministries of healing? These questions continue to trouble the Christian community.

The question of the relations among western medicine, modern holism, tradi-

<sup>5</sup>Tony Hillerman, *Talking God* (1989; New York: Harper Paperbacks, 1991) 288.

<sup>6</sup>Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (New York: Praeger, 1966) 88: “To sum up, a primitive world view [which she elsewhere describes as an ‘undifferentiated’ view] looks out on a universe which is personal in several different senses. Physical forces are thought of as interwoven with the lives of persons. Things are not completely distinguished from persons and persons are not completely distinguished from their external environment. The universe responds to speech and mime. It discerns the social order and intervenes to uphold it.”

<sup>7</sup>Cf. M. L. Daneel, *Quest for Belonging: Introduction to a Study of African Independent Churches* (Harare, Zimbabwe: Mambo, 1987) 251. According to Daneel, the “African holistic life-view” is partly intuitive, partly scriptural, and partly a reaction against the western dualistic view.

<sup>8</sup>Söderström, *God Gave Growth*, 99.

tional healing, and biblical healing require further study. Here, we will attempt to look more carefully at the biblical world using the story of the healing (and/or cure?) of the ten lepers.<sup>9</sup>

Luke's account does indeed seem to make a distinction between what might be called cure on the one hand and healing on the other. Ten are cured of the symptoms of leprosy; one is pronounced "well" (σέσωκέν). What is the difference?

Jesus himself invites a comparison between the nine and the one; and such a comparison quickly reveals a careful literary structure in this pericope:

<b>Part One</b>	<b>Part Two</b>
	[One sees]
A Ten come to Jesus	A' One comes to Jesus
B Ten keep distance	B' One at Jesus' feet
C Ten lament	C' One praises
[Jesus sees]	[Interlude: the Samaritan issue]
D Jesus sends the ten	D' Jesus sends the one
E Ten are cleansed	E' One is "well"

Other than the interlude about the Samaritan issue and the differently placed observations about seeing, the literary parallelism is exact. A comparison of the actions in the two parts of the story will prove useful.

1. *The approach to Jesus.* In part one, the ten approach, but keep their distance. This distance reminds us of their leprosy, of course; it is made necessary by the ritual uncleanness associated with the disease (Leviticus 13-14). But it also serves to contrast the first part of the story with the second; for in part two the one prostrates himself at Jesus' feet. Here there is no longer distance, no longer uncleanness. The distance in part one is not only physical; it is theological as well.

The approach by the ten in part one is simply the necessary approach of those seeking aid, the approach of the seeker, the petitioner, the lamenter. It is surely not to be despised, for it parallels the seeking of God in Old Testament worship. In part two of Luke's account, however, something greater occurs. The one not only "approaches" Jesus, he "turns back" (ὑποστρέφω) in order to do so. "Turning" is hardly an accidental action in the Bible.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>9</sup>Whereas the examples cited above speak of "healing" that does not include "cure," the full healing of the Samaritan leper includes cure also. This is most often the case in biblical healing stories. Although even cursory concordance work demonstrates that the biblical words for "healing" are broad and inclusive terms, including much more than physical cure, they most often do envision physical cure as well. One wonders whether, in the light of the biblical witness, the modern distinction between healing and cure might too quickly move beyond cure in its proper concern for healing.

<sup>10</sup>While the text does not use ὑποστρέφω, the term more often used in the New Testament to describe a theological "turning," ὑποστρέφω is not without its own significance. It can sometimes refer to a simple act of "returning" with no particular theological significance (so can ὑποστρέφω), but on several occasions Luke relates the term to an encounter with Jesus or the gospel that results in a turning toward proclamation or prayer (Luke 8:39; 24:9, 33-35, 53-53; Acts 8:25; 14:21-22). Most significantly, perhaps, in his own conversion, Saul, like the Samaritan leper, is given sight and then "turns" (ὑποστρέφω) to do the work of the gospel (Acts 22:13-17). In our story, the term gains significance because of Jesus' own expectation that all those cleansed should "turn" (v. 18). But, as we have seen, only one does

The significance of the one's turn is stressed by the goal of his journey. Prior to turning back, the Samaritan leper, with the nine others, was on his way to the priests. It was the priests who could pronounce them clean, thus readmitting them to social intercourse and temple worship (i.e., the presence of God). If we ask the question raised by the World War II conservation posters, "Is this trip necessary?" the answer, in their social and theological world, was a clear yes. The way to the priests was the way to social and ritual health, not merely physical health. Yet, the one does not continue on this path. Instead, he turns around and heads for Jesus. This is nothing less than a move from an Old Testament to a New Testament worldview. For the one it is no longer the priests who define social status, but Jesus. It is no longer the priests who grant admission to God's presence, but Jesus. The text does not despise the priests and their world, but it recognizes the presence of something greater: the kingdom of God in the person of Jesus. The one who will be termed "healed" has turned toward this greater reality.

2. *Seeing*. Ten are cleansed; one "sees" (ὁράω) that he is cleansed. It is hardly necessary to emphasize the significance of "seeing" in biblical theology. Throughout the Bible, sight to the blind is a preeminent gift and symbol of the divine presence. In Luke, Jesus reminds John's disciples: "Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have good news brought to them" (7:22). They are called to see (ὁράω) that the new world has broken in.<sup>11</sup> Here is another Old Testament/New Testament move. Once more, the point is not to belittle the people of the Old Covenant. They bear their own rich and essential witness to the work of God in the world. But they have not seen Jesus, says Luke, whereas the disciples have. And now, so has the Samaritan leper. Nothing will ever be the same.

The leper's seeing in part two (v. 15) parallels Jesus' seeing in part one (v. 14). This is not the only passage in Luke where Jesus sees and has compassion (cf. 7:13; 13:12). In this respect, Jesus' seeing is like that of the father of the prodigal son (15:20)—but unlike that of the disciples, who see and rebuke (18:5), or of the crowds, who see and murmur (19:7). Thus, to see (like the Samaritan) is to be like Jesus, to be with Jesus, to have taken one's stand for the gospel.

Why, in our story, are ten cleansed but only one sees? Why do some see and some not? The question is not unique to this story, of course. Why—given the same experiences—do some believe while others do not? Why, as Claus Westermann puts it, do some encounter God in their healing, while others do not?<sup>12</sup> The act of coming to faith remains a mystery in biblical theology and in human experience.

3. *Lament and praise*. In part one of the story, ten lament (actually, ten petition,

so (v. 15). In the LXX, too, ὑποστρέφω, when, used to translate תשוב ("turn, repent"), normally carries a simple physical or geographical meaning. At least on one occasion, however, there is a strong theological sense. Sinaiticus uses ὑποστρέφω to speak of God's "repentance" (turning away his wrath) in Prov 24:18.

<sup>11</sup>"Seeing" (ὁράω) has messianic significance in other Lucan texts as well (cf. 2:26, 30; 9:32; 19:37; 21:31; 23:47). Indeed, "many prophets and kings desired to see what you see, but did not see it" (10:24).

<sup>12</sup>Westermann, "Salvation and Healing in the Community," 13.

but petition is one element of the biblical laments); in part two, one praises. Again, the point is not that there is anything wrong with lamentation. Indeed, the lament has an essential place in Old Testament theology. It is a faithful turning to God, part of the dialogue with God that shapes the future. It provides the occasion, in fact, for God to be God, to act on Israel's behalf (Exod 2:23-25; 3:7-10).<sup>13</sup>

No, there is nothing wrong with lament. The problem is that we hear nothing more from the nine, whereas, as we know from both individual psalms and the shape of the Psalter itself, the human dialogue with God does not end with lament. Experiencing or anticipating God's response, it moves from lament to praise. It is possible, of course, that a particular case yields no positive response, or at least no immediate response (Psalm 88). But that is the exception. When God delivers, praise arises. Not that it should, but that it does. It is spontaneous, as Luke well knows. "Which of you" having found a lost sheep or lost coin will not rejoice (Luke 15:3-10)? The fact that the nine do not respond is, in itself, confirmation of the fact that they have not seen. In modern vernacular, they do not "get it." For whatever reason, "it" (the fresh encounter with God) has not happened for them. Is it that they take the ritual process and God's steadfast love for granted? Is God's deliverance so expected, so stereotypical (a possible cynical reading of Psalm 107), that it is for them simply business as usual? We don't know. Their lack of response is as much a mystery as the faith born in the Samaritan. But the Samaritan cannot not respond. His mouth is opened and praise happens (Ps 40:2-3). He finds himself in a new dialogical relationship with God.

The parallelism in verses 15 and 16 is striking: "praising God" and "thanking Jesus" appear to be equivalent acts. The christological implication cannot be avoided. The entire experience (need, petition, divine intervention, praise) parallels precisely the structure of the Old Testament laments<sup>14</sup> — except that here the intervention comes through the word of Jesus, and the praise is addressed equally to Jesus and to God. Both the overall structure and the particular poetic parallelism identify Jesus and God. The Samaritan leper has made a powerful christological confession. That, too, is part of his being well.

4. *And he was a Samaritan.* There is no differentiation among the ten lepers in part one. They are a group, individually anonymous, acting as one. That had its rewards, no doubt. Misery loves company. Although cut off from society, they had a society of their own. In a certain sense, such community is already healing. But perhaps not always so. The trouble with the nine in part two is that they remain undifferentiated. Only the Samaritan emerges from the group to become an individual, to enter into the healing event, to become a person. Both the experience of

<sup>13</sup>Claus Westermann, "The Role of the Lament in the Theology of the Old Testament," in *Praise and Lament in the Psalms* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981) 259-280, esp. 261. Terence E. Fretheim, "Prayer in the Old Testament: Creating Space in the World for God," in *A Primer on Prayer*, ed. Paul Sponheim (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988) 63-76, esp. 54-57.

<sup>14</sup>Frederick J. Gaiser, "Songs in the Story: A Study of the Songs of Lament and Praise in the Historical and Narrative Literature of the Old Testament and the Apocrypha" (Dr. theol. diss., University of Heidelberg, 1984) 39, 44, 86-87 (note 33).

suffering and the experience of deliverance can produce a sense of self, a sense of having or being something unique.<sup>15</sup> That, too, is healing.

Our story, in its simplicity, offers remarkable insight into healthy and unhealthy relationships between the individual and the community. The community of the suffering is necessary and rewarding. But holding on to that community in the face of deliverance from suffering does not allow the full life available to the risk-taker, the one willing or able to emerge from the group. Still, even such a newly delivered and newly discovered self will not find full life alone. Life is found at the foot of Jesus and, by implication, within the community of those around Jesus (including, at the very least, the disciples, who are present with Jesus on this occasion). The Samaritan, previously an outsider twice over (as leper and as Samaritan), previously an insider only among the sick, is now welcome in the community of the followers of Jesus. Although one hopes these folks have learned something about love of neighbor from Jesus' teaching, it seems unlikely that they welcome him primarily because they are more tolerant, more politically aware, more enlightened than their contemporaries. We have met these people. The disciples are sinners and outcasts. But that may be precisely the point. Because they were outcasts, but now incasts, they can accept another outcast. Community comes from being accepted as one of the members by the Head.

Four people in the Gospel of Luke hear from Jesus those powerful words, "Your faith has made you well." Each is, in her or his own way, an outcast: the woman of questionable reputation, washing Jesus' feet (7:50); the woman with the twelve-year flow of blood (8:48); the Samaritan leper (17:19); and the blind man (18:42). The woman was a "sinner," cut off by the righteous. The blind and the bleeding, the lepers and the Samaritans were socially alienated or ritually unclean, excluded from the temple. In each case, part of being made "well" is being no longer outcast. Though cut off from the temple, the "temple" (i.e., Jesus) has come to them (Matt 12:6; John 2:19-21; Rev 21:22).

Each of the four accounts is followed, either directly (Luke 8:1; 17:20-22) or after another related narrative (9:1-2; 19:11), by conversation about the kingdom of God. Each account adds a dimension to our understanding of the kingdom. It includes the forgiveness of sins (Luke 7), resurrection from the dead (Luke 8), a call to suffering and finding one's life by losing it (Luke 17), and a wholeness that includes both physical healing (Luke 18) and salvation (19:9).

Being well is life in the kingdom, life lived in the expectation and reality of eschatological deliverance. It knows the particularity of Jesus, the Savior and Healer. It is found in faith that is both appropriately communal and profoundly individual. It shares the comfort and liberation promised in Isaiah to those who were blind and in captivity (Isa 61:1, cf. Luke 4:18-19; Isa 35:5-6, cf. Luke 7:22). Major themes of biblical theology come together in these four Lucan accounts.

5. *Go your way.* Both the ten and the one are told by Jesus to "go." Here, too,

<sup>15</sup>Frederick J. Gaiser, "The Emergence of the Self in the Old Testament," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 14/1 (1992) 1-29.

the connection between the two parts of the story seems strong and deliberate. Again, there is nothing wrong with the going in part one. It is obedient, and it seeks deliverance. It is not that the ten (or the nine) get nothing or little. The promise of cure is not nothing! It is that the one gets more – the more that could have been available to all. His new going, in the second part of the story, is no longer self-directed, no longer for the sake of his own recovery. It is other-directed. He goes now with a sense of vocation. He has become a praiser, a teller of the mighty works of God in Jesus. Jesus entered the scene at the outset of this story, and wonderful things became possible. At the end of the story, in the second part of a literary inclusio, the one made well enters the world, and wonderful things will be possible. Jesus is now more present than at the outset, for his work and ministry are present in the one made well.

### III. ON BEING WELL

What have we learned from our comparison of the nine and the one in the story of the ten lepers? What does it mean to be healed?

1. *What happens to the nine is not belittled.* To be sure, Jesus does wonder where they are. The question may be theologically parallel to God's "Where are you?" to Adam in Gen 3:9. Though it is certainly not desirable to give occasion for such divine inquiry, the inquiry itself indicates an ongoing divine concern. The problem with the nine lies in their lack of response, not in the gift they have been given or any lack of divine interest. Their quest for cure is legitimate; it fully parallels the seeking of the lamenter in the Old Testament Psalter. To seek help from God is to take God seriously. To approach Jesus is to recognize, with more or less sophistication, that special things happen when Jesus appears.

2. *The Samaritan leper does not receive "healing" instead of "cure" but full healing in addition to physical cure.* The God of the Bible, the God who works through Jesus of Nazareth, is the God of creation and re-creation, a God fully as interested in the body as in the "soul." Although YaDeau is quite right in his observation that healing is "independent of the extent to which an individual's physical body is cured," as a physician he is, of course, interested in cure as well as healing – or perhaps better, interested in a full healing that includes cure as well. In the Bible, so is God and so is Jesus. Biblical theology will recognize that healing can be present without cure (e.g., Rom 5:1-5); more, it knows that healing and wholeness may include suffering, the giving of oneself for the sake of the other (Isa 53:5) or enmity incurred because of one's witness to the gospel (2 Cor 11:21-30). Still, biblical theology does not embrace suffering or healing without cure too quickly. God's preference, God's final gift, is that the lame should walk and the blind see (Isa 35:5-6; cf. Luke 7:22). A biblically based healing ministry will not *demand* cure. It will recognize that a life of finitude in a world of sin will include illness and death. It will even accept a call to bear the cross for the sake of the other. But it will surely pray for cure, recognizing God's creative power and God's will that creation itself, including the human, be renewed.

3. *Though it does not despise cure, healing offers more than cure; it presents itself*



as a promise and a reality even in the midst of death. As part of his healing, the Samaritan leper experiences both a new sense of self and a new sense of community, a full and appropriate balance between individuality and community. He lives under a new paradigm, with a new sense of meaning and a new goal in life. Many contemporary understandings of healing and wholeness include the same elements, often using the language of self-esteem, community, direction, intentionality, and spirituality. Is biblical healing, then, another example of the same thing? Is this what the Bible means by being made "well"? Yes and no. Just as there is no reason to despise what God does in our story for the nine, there is no reason to despise the Creator's work in and through modern therapy and alternative modes of healing (so long as this seeks to produce a person who is, in the best sense of the word, more fully human). However, the story's definition of healing includes more. It describes a remarkably particular sense of wholeness, one that recognizes God, who created the world and who elected Israel, as a player in human life, one that sees the eschatological saving and healing presence of God in the person of Jesus.<sup>16</sup> Community is not merely human intercourse; it is the church, participation in the body of those who recognize Christ as Head, the outcasts and aliens who find a home among the disciples of Jesus. Meaning is not merely self-directedness; it is the mission of the gospel, the proclamation of God's work in Christ. Wholeness is given not merely by therapy but by forgiveness; it recognizes the essential incompleteness of the human without the saving work of God. Human work in the world is not primarily about seeking one's fortune or striving for meaning; it is a matter of vocation, of being sent into the world as God's emissary. Cure and healing are given not only for the sake of one's own well-being; they are gifts of a Christ who announces that life is found as it is given away (Luke 17:33), who models a form of mission by those who come not to be served but to serve (Luke 12:37).<sup>17</sup>

4. *Many definitions of holistic and traditional healing know of the need to care for the spiritual dimension of human life – often, however, with little content and no way to test the truth or value of such spirituality.* Biblical healing recognizes a spiritual dimension to life because it sees the human person created in the image of God. Additionally, however, because of sin and its consequences, it recognizes the human need for more than creation can offer. The need for healing recognizes a distance between the human and God, the reality of alienation between human and God and between human and human. It announces God's intervention in the world to overcome this alienation in the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. It includes a call to ministry in the name of Christ. Healing and saving, healing and mission are intimately and integrally related.

<sup>16</sup>According to Ferdinand Hahn, "Heilung und Heil aus der Sicht des Neuen Testaments," *Zehntes Seminar für christlichen ärztlichen Dienst* II (December 1970) ii, amid the great variety in the healing stories of the New Testament, the basic theme ("*Grundthema*") of every one is the breaking in of the kingdom of God, God's eschatological deliverance of human beings (cf. Luke 11:20).

<sup>17</sup>In a sermon included in this issue of this journal, Martin Luther recognizes how the experience of healing gives rise to the vocation of service to neighbor. See Martin Luther, "'Take Your Bed and Go': Sermon on Matthew 9:2-8," *Word & World* 16/3 (1996) 283.

The fact that biblical healing stories play with the distinction between healing and forgiveness (Luke 5:18-25) shows that such distinction is possible and real. Still, Luke's multiple uses of  $\sigma\acute{\omega}\zeta\omega$  show that the distinction is not absolute.<sup>18</sup> Finally, there seems to be no healing without forgiveness and no forgiveness without healing (Ps 103:3).

Thus, it will not be possible to assert, with some parts of the Lutheran tradition, for example, that the church is no longer in the healing business (other than through the secular vocations of its members), that divine healing was a reality only in the time of Christ.<sup>19</sup> Such a sharp distinction between healing and saving is rendered impossible by Christ's word to the Samaritan leper. God means for people to be well; God provides for such wellness not only through creation and human vocation, but also through the ministry of prayer and the proclamation of the renewing power of God's Spirit in and through the gospel of Christ. Though Jesus is a prophet, he is not merely another John the Baptist, preaching a gospel of repentance. Jesus brings the new creation promised by the prophets (e.g., Isa 35:1-7).<sup>20</sup>

On the other hand, neither will it be possible to promise, with some parts of pentecostal or charismatic tradition, the certainty of cure to those who have faith or to focus ministry primarily on the goal of cure. Such ministry will deny the theology of the cross with its call to suffer for the sake of the other. It will fail to take seriously the realities of human sin and finitude with their ongoing effects on human health. Though Jesus works miracles of healing, he is not merely a charismatic miracle worker. Jesus is the Savior who refuses to save himself (Luke 23:35), the physician come not to heal himself (Luke 4:23), the one whose ministry and whose service lead to the cross.

Nor will Christian ministry, to the degree it is defined by the Bible, be content to provide humans with various kinds of therapy. While therapy has its place as part of God's creative work available to all people, the church's healing ministry will always include specific reference to the saving work of Christ, to the gospel. It will focus not so much on human potential as on the new life given by the death and resurrection of Christ and available through word and sacrament. Though Jesus is a spiritual leader, a wisdom teacher, a wonderful counselor, he is not merely any or all of those things. In him is the eschatological kingdom of God.

Further, though the church will rightly recognize the work of the Creator in some aspects of traditional or native healing, it will not apologize for offering

<sup>18</sup>See Powell, "Salvation in Luke-Acts," 6-7.

<sup>19</sup>According to the then United Lutheran Church in America in 1962: "Christ's injunctions to his disciples to perform such authoritative miracles were specific commissions for that time and circumstance, when the apostolic age marked a unique turning point in the history of redemption. Healing miracles are not part of any specified, Christ-commanded assignment for the on-going church" — *Anointing and Healing* (Philadelphia: United Lutheran Church Board of Publication, 1962) 21; cited by Martin E. Marty, *Health and Medicine in the Lutheran Tradition* (New York: Crossroad, 1983) 92.

<sup>20</sup>Hahn, "Heilung und Heil," uses the gifts of the Spirit in 1 Corinthians 12 to make this same point: "The commission to heal — in connection with the message of salvation — to heal in the name of Jesus Christ, therefore remains" (iv).

something greater: the identification of the Creator with the incarnate One, come to seek and to save the lost. Biblical healing will distinguish between miracle and magic, between grace and appeasement. While God comes to humanity in and through creation, God is not identified with part or all of creation. God is not made available through human ritual, though God makes himself available in Jesus of Nazareth. Though both Israelite priests and Jesus made use of healing techniques common to native cultures, Jesus is not merely a shaman. He does not provide healing to the initiate through ecstatic experience or unlock the secrets of creation known only to him; he embodies the very presence of God, and in that presence sin, death, and the devil cannot abide.

Because Jesus announces and brings the kingdom of God, healing will always be part of the work of the church of Christ. And, as has always been the case, God will surprise us with his gifts. ⊕