

Sunday, March 14, 2021 Numbers 21:4-9 John 3:14-21

Covenants and Commitments:
"Covenant of Healing: Look Up and Be Healed"

How would you define your health? Good, ok, great? How does one know whether they are healthy? As people age we often hear stories about their physical health and all its aches and pains and in many circumstances- the next trip to see the doctor or specialist, or in the recapping of medications. But when we look at what makes people healthy, it is not just our physical abilities or inabilities or the changes in our bodies. What occurs to us mentally or emotionally affects us physically. And what happens with us spiritually often involves what we are called to do and say in relationship with our faith and belief in God, Christ and the Spirit. As Christians our spiritual health plays an integral role of our whole being. And so when we are asked if we are healthy we must answer in a holistic way defining where we are healthy or not. We need to respond by being positive- looking towards tomorrow; informed- knowing what is happening in our world and in personally; connected-with family and friends and to be active- even if it is walking around the house, yard or block. Being healthy means looking after one's basic needs and choosing to live with a positive attitude.

Moses continues to lead the people through the desert towards the Promised Land. Even after he has given them God's commandments and they have heard what to do or not do in relationship with each other and God, the people are still not content. The people spoke against God and Moses and whined to him. Why have you brought us out of Egypt to die in the wilderness? There is no food, no water and we detest this miserable food. God had been providing them manna, quail and water. But they just complained. God heard these complaints and so he sent poisonous serpents among the people. The serpents bit many of the people and they died. Then the people came to Moses as they had realized that they had sinned against God and Moses. They asked Moses to take away the serpents. So Moses prayed to God for the people. God told Moses to make a bronze serpent and place it upon a pole. If a serpent bit people, they were to look to the pole with the bronze serpent on it and they would live. Again God through Moses told them what they could do in order to be reconciled with him. They listened, looked up and were healed.

On March 11, 2020 the World Health Organization declared the world in pandemic due to the spread of covid19. In the year since the pandemic started, over 2.6 million people have died worldwide with the most deaths occurring in the US. This week many people and communities have gathered to remember those who died, honour the frontline workers and

those deemed essential for the ongoing movement of goods and services and prayed for healing and hope. We know that with the vaccinations now be administered around the world, there is hope that this pandemic will soon be over. But there is still a lot to be done to get the world as a whole to this place. And then there is the after effects and impact to the world which will be felt for generations which will follow. People have been affected by the covid19 in all ways- physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually. Emotionally and mentally people have not been able to hug each other or even be present closer than 6 feet for over a year. Physical touch we know brings healing and comfort but this was not possible for many while in hospital. Spiritually people have often asked, where is God in this? Asking, does God care? Or asking, where do we as individuals fit in relationship with God and what can we do to help others? We know that the economy is unstable with lost jobs, unstable housing availability and rising housing costs. The number of people seeking assistance with food and groceries has surpassed levels projected early on. Yet we continue to move forward into this year and anticipate a time of newness and rebirth as spring will soon be upon us.

But there is hope for people around the world are praying and seeking God to bring healing upon the world. From our reading in John 3, we learn of Nicodemus' visit to Jesus at night. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and leader of the Jews. He went to see Jesus and acknowledged him as a Rabbi, a teacher who came from God. He states this because he has seen what Jesus has done with people and through his teachings. Jesus then states no one can see the kingdom of God without being born from above. Nicodemus did not understand what Jesus was referring to as spiritual rebirth. Jesus further explains what this means and then asks why he did not know this as a teacher of Israel. He does not condemn him but questions how he does not know this, and asks if he had told him about earthly things and didn't believe how could he believe in heavenly things. Jesus then tells him that no one has ascended into heaven except the one who descended from heaven—as he referred to himself and what was to occur. But it is the next statement of Jesus, that calls us to wonder about what Jesus is teaching Nicodemus. He states, "And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Through Moses act of raising the serpent- for the purpose of healing those who looked to it- we come to realize that Jesus himself will be raised up, for the purpose of healing. Jesus purpose is then stated clearly in one of the most oft quoted verses of the Bible. "For God so loved the world that he gave his only So, so that everyone who believes in him may not perish but may have eternal life." God gave to the world—not just some people but all; Jesus his only

Son, so that those who believe in him will not die- but live eternally through him. Jesus' purpose in coming into the world, was not to condemn or destroy what God had created, but to save it. Jesus is the Light that comes to save the world. And how? By being raised up on a pole with a cross beam like the bronze serpent. And this pole and cross beam, becomes the Cross of Christ, where he died but also a symbol of hope and new life and healing.

If we are to look at the logo of the World Health Organization and that of worldwide emergency services' Star of Life' (on ambulances), we will notice a few things. In each is a pole with a serpent surrounding it. This symbol is reminiscent of the story of Moses and the serpent. But it actually traces back to the Greek god of healing, Asclepius, who is mentioned by Homer in *Iliad*. (c.8thc B.C.E) Statues of this god depict him holding a rod with a snake coiled around it. Different theories for this have been given for the meaning of this symbol including the notion that the snake sheds its skin and by doing so this is a symbol of regeneration of healing. People throughout history have had ailments of all kinds and so to be healed means to have health restored.

By faith in God and through his Son Jesus we receive the ultimate gift of health when we leave the pains and suffering and sorrow of this world and are received into God's heaven to begin our eternal life. This is why Jesus came- to be raised on a cross in death, so that we may be spiritually reborn and given eternal life through him. By looking at Christ's death on a cross, we may receive new life-and healing and hope. Jesus offers us this for he is the one who brings healing- holistic healing to all. He is the Great Physician and this image of Christ as the great healer is able to help us as we continue to pray for healing and for hope in him. On Easter Sunday, April 13, 2020 to honour health care and front line workers Brazil illuminated the Christ the Redeemer statue to look like a doctor caring for the many affected by covid19 around the world. This is an image to hold in our hearts as Jesus is the great Healer of all.

As we continue to journey this Lenten season, there are many who do not know Jesus as the Saviour who died on the cross. They do not know that he came because God loved us so much that he wants to be in relationship with us. And there are many who do not know the path which led to his death on the cross or why he suffered for us. Jesus is God's Son, he is also the one who died and rises to new life. By believing in him we receive the gift of new life and hope. But are we willing to look up and be healed by Christ? Remembering his death on the cross are we willing to see him for who he is- the Son of God? Are we willing to come to him and seek forgiveness so that we might live eternally with the Christ of the cross and the empty tomb?

As we approach the beginning of spring, signs of new life will emerge; sunshine, warm afternoons, buds on trees and flowers emerging from the ground. But what is most significant is the healing- holistic healing that we may receive by Christ the great physician and the Saviour of the world. Let us rise up and be healed through Jesus Christ and know in our hearts that we have received the gift, hope and promise of eternal life if we profess our faith and believe.

Let us pray

God of grace, we thank you for Jesus, and we thank you that through you we have hope and the promise of eternal life. Enable us to hear your Spirit speaking to us and touching our hearts as we strive to be faith in all that we say and do. In Christ's name we pray. Amen.