2 Corinthians 12:2-10

2I know a person in Christ who fourteen years ago was caught up to the third heaven—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows.3And I know that such a person—whether in the body or out of the body I do not know; God knows—4was caught up into Paradise and heard things that are not to be told, that no mortal is permitted to repeat.5On behalf of such a one I will boast, but on my own behalf I will not boast, except of my weaknesses.6But if I wish to boast, I will not be a fool, for I will be speaking the truth. But I refrain from it, so that no one may think better of me than what is seen in me or heard from me,7even considering the exceptional character of the revelations. Therefore, to keep\* me from being too elated, a thorn was given to me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated.\*8Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,9but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power\* is made perfect in weakness.’ So, I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.10Therefore I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities for the sake of Christ; for whenever I am weak, then I am strong.

Mark 6:1-13

6He left that place and came to his home town, and his disciples followed him.2On the sabbath he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were astounded. They said, ‘Where did this man get all this? What is this wisdom that has been given to him? What deeds of power are being done by his hands!3Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary\* and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon, and are not his sisters here with us?’ And they took offence\* at him.4Then Jesus said to them, ‘Prophets are not without honor, except in their home town, and among their own kin, and in their own house.’5And he could do no deed of power there, except that he laid his hands on a few sick people and cured them.6And he was amazed at their unbelief.

**The Mission of the Twelve**

Then he went about among the villages teaching.7He called the twelve and began to send them out two by two, and gave them authority over the unclean spirits.8He ordered them to take nothing for their journey except a staff; no bread, no bag, no money in their belts;9but to wear sandals and not to put on two tunics.10He said to them, ‘Wherever you enter a house, stay there until you leave the place.11If any place will not welcome you and they refuse to hear you, as you leave, shake off the dust that is on your feet as a testimony against them.’12So they went out and proclaimed that all should repent.13They cast out many demons, and anointed with oil many who were sick and cured them.

The Healing that Matters Most

Sometimes it can be an advantage that no one knows you. I grew up in a small town in rural Virginia, and if you sneezed people knew it. The weekly paper, *The Rappahannock Times* had a section on all the local court cases that included speeding violations, and I got my name in the paper a few times. I’m sure that if anyone from Tappahannock who remembers me found out that I am a pastor of a church, their eyes would get wide and they would declare, “*Him??”*

Everyone in Nazareth knew Jesus’ family. I doubt that Jesus had received any speeding tickets, but people knew his family. They might say things like, “Isn’t that Jesus the Plumber…or was he a carpenter? Isn’t he the son of Mary? Wasn’t Jesus born a little too soon after the wedding? Aren’t those his brothers? Don’t they owe us some money? And aren’t these his sisters? What a motley crew they are!”

Another problem Jesus had: He was the son of a carpenter, and everyone knew that the son of a carpenter would become a carpenter, and his son would be a carpenter, and so forth and so on. There wasn’t much social mobility in Jesus’ day, and the American Dream hadn’t been invented yet. So for Jesus to start teaching in his hometown church one morning was a bit of a shock. The people who would normally teach were the scribes or the elders, trained and licensed pastors, and they were educated folk who had studied the Torah and the prophets. For Jesus the Carpenter to appear in the synagogue and start preaching would have been like Joe the School Custodian putting on a suit and tie and starting to teach a class at the local high school. When you’re a carpenter from a long line of carpenters, no one is going to listen to anything you say unless it has to do with carpentry.

But if you go to the next town where no one knows you, you’d have an easier time of it. People don’t know that you’re (merely) a carpenter or plumber or whatever, so they might actually listen to you. And just because you’re a carpenter or a custodian or whatever doesn’t mean that you don’t know anything about God: you may know more than a priest or professor. I had a friend in South Korea, a man from England who taught English at a language instititute. He was an excellent teacher, loved and respected by his students. I was his boss for awhile. When I was no longer his boss, and Hyesun and I were preparing to move to the U.S., he told me that the degree he had shown during interviews was a document he created, listing a university that never existed. He had never been to college, yet he was recognized as the best teacher in the institute. Yet if the word spread that this man only had a high school education, his students would have learned far less, because they would perceive that there was less value in his teaching. So it was for Jesus in his hometown synagogue. The people didn’t find as much value in his preaching because they didn’t have a very high opinion of the one who was preaching. And if the person who is preaching doesn’t have all the credentials that tell you he is a licensed preacher, you have a tendency to not listen very well to what he’s saying. Likewise, if the person who is trying to cure illness doesn’t have a medical license, you’re not going to have much confidence in his ability to heal you.

Jesus expressed the problem this way: “Prophets are not without honor except in their hometown, among their own people.” In other words, the fact that so few were being healed was that so few were *honoring* Jesus. In somewhat modern slang, too many people were dissing Jesus. Like Rodney Dangerfield, Jesus wasn’t getting no respect. Does it seem odd to you that one needs to honor Jesus before being healed? I mean, you go to the clinic, you don’t have to honor a doctor in order for him to treat you successfully for an illness. You don’t need to respect a dentist for him to successfully extract a bad tooth. Yet there appears to be this connection in Jesus’ case: no honor no healing.

Failing to honor Jesus is failing to honor God, and failing to honor God is the worst sickness that one could ever have. Failing to honor God is refusing grace. The brunt of Jesus’ message is “repent.” Jesus wants people to know that they have strayed away from God, that the path they are on is the wrong one, and in fact they are sick. When he sent out the disciples two by two, he makes this kind of mental healing their focus in giving them authority over unclean spirits. The only healings that they perform is casting out demons. This kind of healing must be completed before physical healing can take place as our mental health has a great affect on our physical health.

In fact, if we repent, if we are healed in our minds, we can accept physical illness and injury with the right attitude. Paul pleads to Christ three times to take away the thorn in his flesh, but Christ refuses, telling him, “my grace is sufficient.” Paul’s sickness causes him to suffer, but through his weakness God’s strength is seen. And Paul accepts this, as we should when our bodies are sick or injured. We simply don’t know how God may be using our condition to bring others to him, particularly those who share that physical condition and need courage and peace in facing their illness.

In this light, physical illness can be a blessing. There are people who go through life having a passive belief in God only as long as their lives seem to be going well according to their own criteria. They have health, wealth, happy home and hearth, and they may credit God with all these things without ever spending time getting to know God. Then, when their health or their marriage or their job fails them, they ask God in bewilderment, “Why are you doing this to me?” The fact that they may finally be addressing God directly, seeking God in earnest, may be the answer to their question. They have never known God, never honored God. Now they are truly seeking God. Some will be disappointed and turn their back on God, but others will come to know God as they never have before, and for that they can be thankful!

The question to ask yourself this morning is, “Am I open to Christ’s healing?” We may not see ourselves as demon-possessed – no one is certain what range of illnesses fell under that rubric in the New Testament – but don’t we all need to grow in our love for others? This is the healing that Jesus wants us to experience. Can we humbly confess our need for his help? Let us honor God by offering our entire being to him that we would grow into the people that he created us to be.