

A baptismal meditation delivered by the Rev. Timothy C. Ahrens, senior minister at the First Congregational Church, United Church of Christ, Columbus, Ohio, August 11, 2013, Pentecost 12, Proper 14, dedicated to Mr. G. Dene Barnard for 40 years at First Church, Dr. Will Fernald on his 90th birthday this week, Arlene Reynolds for her sharing on Jesus, and Anna Theresa Light-Gregory on her baptismal day, and always to the glory of God!

“Jesus is Healer and Teacher”

Isaiah 1:1, 10-20; Luke 12:32-40

**(Part II of V in the sermon series
“What a Difference Jesus Makes”)**

Note: This is a series of sermons based on the two questions I posed to the congregation in June, July, and (now) August.

When you hear Jesus’ name, what comes to your mind? Whatever your response to the “name of Jesus,” how has your answer made a difference in your life?

I begin today with a beautiful reflection on Jesus by Arlene Reynolds – our long time and beloved member and a friend on this journey, the beacon of light and leader of Bethlehem on Broad St., our Christmas Day ministry to the poor, the lonely, the lost right here at First Church. Arlene is faced with many health concerns today but is here every Sunday she is able to be Thank you Arlene.

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Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations

of each one of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our rock and our salvation. Amen.

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Arlene Reynolds begins her reflections on Jesus with these words:

“He Lives! He Lives In My Heart and Mind and My Soul!!!

“I am so glad that I learned about Jesus through reading and studying the Words of God in our Bible (especially, in the gospels of the New Testament) when I was a little girl growing up in my home, Sunday School, going to D. L. Moody’s Northfield Seminary, Bates College and Capital University and throughout my long life at First Congregational Church.

“When I accepted Jesus and was baptized at 15, I thought of him as a friend and I was his follower. Over the years he has become so much more. He has been my intimate friend and caregiver - my Good Shepherd. He is my travelling companion. Mentor and teacher. He helps me to make good decisions and to act lovingly toward all of God’s people. He inspires me to keep on reading the Bible and other religious books that give guidance and wisdom in today’s’ unsettling world. He helps me to have confidence and courage to risk standing up for unpopular political views. He helps me not to be too angry but unforgiving but charitable toward others. He gives me hope that our country will learn- to not be so greedy but learn to give to poor and the needy.

“Most of all I am so happy that he has given me strength and optimism to live with the physical handicaps that I have had for many years. He, as healer, has restored my mind and soul to overcome body difficulties. He has helped me assist many of other family members and friends dealing with their illnesses and deaths. I started early to learn that all things are possible with God if you believe.”

“When my first husband, Milton, died of cancer at 31 leaving me with the four children and living far apart from relatives in New

England, over and over again Jesus poured out His precious love and understanding on us so we did not have to worry about our daily food, clothing and shelter.

“He guided me through my teaching education and gave me wonderful teaching opportunities as Director of the Downtown Nursery School at First Church onto teaching in Kindergarten and Head Start in the Columbus Public Schools before 18 years at the Children’s Mental Health Center at Children’s Hospital helping preschool children and day care teachers and parents raise their children in the safe and healthy environments.

“He gave me the leadership skills to be a living example because I tried to follow in his footsteps. He led me into being very interested in the mission area at the church and CSEA Association. From this I became very involved in the first Habitat for Humanity, BREAD, Metropolitan Area Council of Churches and the Interfaith Association. In these organizations I have been blessed to work with other fully committed members of Jesus’ ‘kingdom on earth.’ Together we have followed Him to work in harmony for peace, justice and mercy.

“He now gives me many blessings in giving me wonderful caregivers in my immediate family and with all the great friends at First Church. As I live these last years, I do not worry about the future and dying. I know that there is eternal life because Jesus has told us so. ‘I go to prepare a place for you and I will come again to receive you.’ His peace and understanding is eternal! Jesus truly is ‘The Way, The Truth and The Life!’ ”

Thank you, Arlene.

As you hear, woven throughout Arlene’s testimony of faith, the themes of Jesus as healer and teacher rise up. He IS - teacher, healer, a present help in times of trouble, a future hope in life eternal. Because “he lives” we have life. Because “he lives” we have hope. Because “he lives” we find strength for our journey unto death and into life eternal. For Arlene (and so many of us), Jesus is

our rock. He is constant help in times of trouble. He is our friend in the choppy seas of discord. He is our peace in troubled times.

The Gospel of Luke alone has 24 healing stories of Jesus. Luke, a physician and a disciple of Christ, saw in his Savior (which translates “the one who heals”) the healing power and presence of God. Time and time again, Jesus cured people of whatever afflicted them – from blindness to leprosy to mental illness to negativity about life and faith, to death itself. Jesus stepped in and healed people. Through prayer, through faith, through love, medicine and miracles (to draw from Bernie Siegel), Jesus made people well.

When I asked three physicians about Jesus as healer, I received three different answers about his power and presence in their lives and their ministry of healing. Dr. Cami Curren talked about Jesus as her role model. His clarity about the issues in life that really matter influences her daily work with people. He had the ability to listen and be flexible, but in our age when “moral flexibility” seems to leave people wishy-washy and indecisive, Cami sees that Jesus teaches about right and wrong and the things that really matter on life and death issues. She turns to him as her guide on the “big issues” of morality and truth.

Dr. Christen Coyle (who I have known for 24 years – who I confirmed and married and whose children I have baptized through the years) told the story of faith in a woman who has lived an amazing five years with her diagnosis of pancreatic cancer, having stayed alive with laughter and love. She finds humor and joy in life and has the best attitude Christen has ever seen. Like Jesus she preserves with laughter and love. On a personal note, when Christen’s son James was born prematurely and died shortly after his birth, it was Dr. Bell and the team of nurses and physicians who surrounded her that horrible day with kindness, compassion and comfort. They were God’s love incarnated.

Dr. Will Fernald, who turns 90 this Friday and who has practiced as a pediatric physician for 57+ years, has always known the love of Jesus in his life for as long as can remember. Jesus has been for Will – Son of God, teacher, leader and healer, someone who opens the door to God the Father for us. Will believes in God and

science – calling them “*different dimensions of the universe in which we live.*” Prayer has always been a part of his medical practice. Will said, “*I prayed with Christians and non-Christians. Prayer with people often seemed to help them with whatever problems they were facing. Prayer has always been a part of my medical practice and daily life.*” Will continued, “*Two things stand out for me about Jesus – he teaches us how to live and he is an open door to prayer.*”

Similarly, many of you see Jesus as a teacher. For Jen Provenzano, Jesus’ empathy inspires her in her daily walk as a teacher. His compassion and his heart for the poor (especially the most vulnerable little ones with whom she works), he inspires her.

Dr. Mary Lightbody picks up on this teaching theme. She says, “*For me, simply, Jesus was (and is) a teacher who served (and serves) as a counselor, and Jesus is a belief created in our minds and hearts to bring comfort and meaning to our lives.*”

One of my favorite teachers, who has asked to remain anonymous, has always been inspired by the stories of Jesus as told in parables. The parables were the perfect teaching tool. They allowed the listeners then and now to read themselves into the story and learn from them models of faith or lack of faith presented therein. In her daily prayers for years, she has had the face of Jesus in her mind – a face she first saw painted in the 1950s by a Jewish Holocaust survivor. She said, “*He captured the essence of the Jewish Jesus. There in his eyes were compassion, love and kindness. I see his face whenever I pray.*”

As a 12-year-old girl, her father gave her a book by Charles Sheldon, *In His Steps*. That book, published in the late 1930s was the first place she encountered the question, “What would Jesus do?” When the fad came about 60 years later and everyone wore a wristband with WWJD, this teacher thought about Dr. Sheldon and the fact that she had spent her life living into this question. “It gave me something concrete that I could hold onto, something I could live up to,” she said.

At General Synod at the end of June, we were reminded by the Rev. Martin Copenhaver that Jesus not only taught with parables but with questions as well.

“In Jesus, God is still asking. His first words are in the form of a question. Pre-teen Jesus, ‘Why are you searching for me? Did you not know that I was in my father’s house?’ ‘My God . . . why have you forsaken me?’ The Risen Christ, ‘Whom are you looking for? I am hungry, do have some food? What were you talking about along the way? Do you love me?’ Jesus is the ‘Great Questioner.’ Like Socrates, he taught by asking questions. Like the prophets of old, he asked challenging questions.

He continues, *“Did you know that in the four gospels, Jesus asks 307 different questions? In those same four gospels, Jesus, in turn, is asked 183 questions. Of the 183 questions he is asked, Jesus gives direct answers to about 8. Let’s do the math, for every question Jesus answers directly, he asks 38 questions. Here’s another way to put it: Jesus is almost 40 times more likely to ask a question than he is to give a direct answer.”* Asking questions, Copenhaver intones, is essential to the life and ministry of Jesus. He is the great questioner.

Peter Boriin wrote to me, *“Jesus teaches me all the time. He continues to teach me about love, forgiveness and kindness. By serving others, I feel love come back to me. A smile and an unexpected random act of kindness remind me that Jesus is with us all the time. Jesus bathes us in love and when we follow his example of forgiving others and doing a little bit extra to make someone's day brighter that has a ripple effect that we can see propagate to others.”*

Melva Fisher adds, *“I don't look to Jesus so much as the savior of my personal life or my ticket to heaven but as a teacher of how to live here on earth, daily, 365 days a year in relation to my neighbor (who is everyone I meet).”*

I pray this day that our healer and teacher, Jesus Christ, will be with you. I pray that he will inspire you to become a healing

presence in this community of faith and in all the communities where you live and breathe and have your being.

May he smile upon you and be gracious unto you. The Great Questioner will love your questions as his students. He expects them! In your questions he will turn your hearts of wonderment into healed and healing hearts of empathy and compassion. Walk with him as he seeks to walk with you – and you will be surprised by his way of truth, life, light and love. Amen.

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