

HEARTBEATS Staying Connected 7/28/2023

Dear Friends in CHRIST,

I've been having some small medical problems lately, as do many of us. In my case, they have impacted my hearing in one ear and one of my eyes to a small degree. There have been other unexpected side implications, as well, that have made it somewhat more difficult when I interact with others. They are annoying but I'm receiving medical assistance that should improve these situations soon.

Nevertheless, when such things transpire, I often find myself drawn to stories I know from the Bible that reveal GOD'S power and grace. This has been true in both of these situations. When my eye problem developed about four months ago, I couldn't help but remember the story of JESUS healing the man born blind recorded in John 9. Now certainly, I am not blind and this is a new and temporary condition that I hope to have resolved in a couple of weeks. Still, this biblical story came to mind and I found myself thinking about it in different ways. First, when JESUS and the disciples come upon the man, the disciples want to know who sinned, the man or his parents. The belief in JESUS' day was that bad things came to you as punishment from GOD. If you were sick, disabled, poor, or had other troubles, it was clear because you or someone close to you had done something that angered GOD so that GOD had sent this misfortune upon you as the consequence. Thus followed the idea that if you were healthy and rich, you were receiving GOD'S favor. Now I didn't think much about this, nor did I wonder what I had done to upset GOD. I know I do plenty all the time that is not what GOD wants for or from me, and I also reject that GOD punishes for our sins. If that were true, what is the point of JESUS' death on the cross? What did draw my attention from the story, however, was how JESUS healed the man. We're told that JESUS spit on the ground and made some mud with HIS saliva, and then put the mud on the man's eyes. Then JESUS told him to wash his eyes in the Pool of Siloam, and when he did, he came home able to see. Very briefly, I toyed with the idea of making mud and putting it on my ailing eye. I discarded this thought very quickly for a variety of reasons, including thought that this was JESUS' spittle that made the mud. Of greater significance, though, was remembering that JESUS told HIS disciples that the man's blindness happened so that the works of GOD might be displayed in him. Now, I'm more than ready to let GOD'S works be displayed by getting my eye fixed, but I also doubt that this is that kind of occasion. More than this, I know that GOD is in the process of healing me through the medical people who are caring for my situation. And I believe that through folks like these is just one of the surprising ways that GOD heals.

The other story I recalled related to my hearing problem is from Mark 7. It is the story of the man who was deaf and could hardly talk. Again, my situation is not nearly as severe as this, but the healing story did enter my mind. In this case, JESUS took the man aside and put HIS fingers in the man's ears. Then HE spit and touched the man's tongue. Finally, HE looked up to heaven and sighed, "Ephphatha!" which means "Be opened!" When putting both stories together, I couldn't help but wonder if there isn't something about JESUS' spit or any spit that makes a difference in healing. Of course, these are the only two recorded stories where JESUS does make use of spittle. And with my recent ear problem, I have been putting my finger in my ear and pulling it out a lot, to no avail. Yet, again, I have good and caring medical folks who are working to correct my situation, so I believe GOD is doing something here as well.

It's fun to think of the stories and ponder what these kinds of healings would mean for me. It's curious to look at the details and think about them in the context of the healings. It's a sign of my own helplessness that I realize that there are somethings that can only be partially corrected or healed beyond some miraculous event from GOD, but when I think about such healings I also ask, "Why me? Why should I be the beneficiary of such healing when there are so many others whose situations are so much worse?" And, as I said before, I also recognize that GOD does and is performing healing in my life through the ministries of those medical professionals who are caring for me. But there is one other thing that I think about when circumstances like this arise: "Is there a reason for me to go through these situations that might have meaning in the future? Is there something for which GOD is equipping me?" I believe and have experience often that GOD does this. So, even in the midst of the challenges of life, I find myself watching to see what GOD is doing so that I can recognize and thank GOD for how GOD has prepared me for what GOD wants me to do in the future.

In CHRIST'S love,
Pastor Jeffrey