

The Healing Ministry of Presence

“Today was a Difficult Day,” said Pooh.

There was a pause.

“Do you want to talk about it?” asked Piglet.

“No,” said Pooh after a bit. “No, I don’t think I do.”

“That’s ok,” said Piglet and he came and sat beside his friend.

“What are you doing?” asked Pooh.

“Nothing really,” said Piglet. “Only I know what Difficult Days are like. I quite often don’t feel like talking about it on my Difficult Days, either.”

“But goodness,” continued Piglet, “Difficult Days are so much easier when you know you have someone there for you. And I’ll always be there for you, Pooh.”

And as Pooh sat there, working through in his head his Difficult Day, while the solid, reliable Piglet sat next to him quietly, swinging his little legs, he thought that his best friend had never been more right. (attributed to A.A. Milne)

As we follow the Gospel of Mark, we find Jesus went right to work ministering to and healing people in his area. We read that he is in the region of Galilee, in the northern portion of Israel, near his hometown of Nazareth. People in the area would have been familiar with Jesus; they would have known his family and how he had most likely learned the trade of carpenter and builder. Imagine their surprise when he was baptized by John, started to attract crowds, and healed people.

We know that he healed Simon’s mother-in-law of her fever, released demons, and healed people of various diseases. We are given no introduction to what is going on; we are thrown in the midst of the ministry of Jesus. It is so fitting of Mark’s gospel as he keeps it short, to the point, and includes just what his original audience needs to know. It doesn’t tell us if

people thanked him, professed some sort of faith in him, or made him a king. We do know that they “hunted” for him and found him alone and in prayer.

In his first letter to the Corinthians, Paul talks about his ministry as well. He became all things to all people, not in a manner that he could simply boast, but learned the customs and the ways of people around him to minister to them. Paul’s ultimate goal is to “do it all for the sake of the gospel, so that I might become a partner in it.” Let’s look at the word “partner.” What are some things you think about when you hear the word, “partner?” I tend to go to a marriage, a law firm, or a major corporation. To become a partner in any sort of business venture comes with a great deal of responsibility.

Part of Paul’s responsibility as a partner was to spread the Gospel message. As Christians who come together to worship, and profess a belief in Jesus as Savior, who was sent to redeem us, we, too are called into a partnership. And maybe, just maybe, we are also called to not only spread the Good News of the Gospel but also to be healers. Some of us are called to be physical healers while others, and that may be most of us, are called to be spiritual or emotional healers.

Let’s go back to our opening scenario with Pooh and Piglet. Do we think that Piglet helped to emotionally heal Pooh? Sometimes, we are called to do just that. We can be present and support, sometimes by just being there. Isn’t it great when you have gone past the awkward point of a friend who just sits with you and you don’t have to say anything? While we are sitting there we can silently pray that they feel God’s loving embrace in their time of need. We can ask God to send some healing to them. Or we can simply sit and “be.”

This is what we sometimes in seminary jokingly referred to as the “ministry of presence” and I know I have referred to it before in sermons. I know that as a pastor I am often involved in

the ministry of presence. Some church members wonder why I show up at all church functions, or at least as many as I can humanly get to. It is the ministry of presence that takes place because the person who is the pastor is there. Other times, when visiting in a hospital or care facility, I will sit by the bed of someone who is asleep or just doesn't feel like talking in that moment. I can wait and simply be present to them. We can do that regardless of our position as we sit on a log and let someone have a Difficult Day in our presence, without the need to fix it or explain it. That can be hard to do, especially with a spouse, parent, or your children when you are the "fixer."

We want to be partners in the spread of the gospel, sometimes by just living it out, sometimes by healing, and sometimes through the ministry of presence. What Jesus teaches us in our gospel lesson today is that we cannot be partners, healers, or ministers without taking time out for prayer. Let's try to set aside even just a few minutes for prayer each day. Now, don't say you'll do it when you're driving as it can lead to you getting lost, driving on "automatic pilot" not getting to where you wanted to be, or even getting into an accident. It can be a simple prayer: God let me feel your presence in me today. Help me to be a better partner, a better healer, and a better listener for your ministry today.

May God be with us all—partners, healers, and pray-ers. Amen!