

SECOND SUNDAY AFTER CHRISTMAS  
JANUARY 3, 2021

Jeremiah 31.7-14

For thus says the LORD:

    sing aloud with gladness for Jacob, and raise shouts for the chief of the nations;  
    proclaim, give praise, and say, "Save O LORD, your people, the remnant of Israel."  
See, I am going to bring them from the land of the north  
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,  
    among them the blind and the lame,  
    along with child and those in labor, together;  
    a great company, they shall return here.

With weeping they shall come, and with consolations I will lead them back,  
I will let them walk by brooks of water,  
in a straight path in which they will not stumble;

    for I have become a father to Israel, and Ephraim is my firstborn.  
Hear the word of the LORD, O nations, and declare it in the coastlands far away;  
Say,

    "He who scattered Israel will gather him,  
    and will keep him as a shepherd a flock."

For the LORD has ransomed Jacob,

    and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him.

They shall come and sing aloud on the height of Zion,  
    and they shall be radiant over the goodness of the LORD,  
    over the grain, the wine and the oil,  
    and over the young of the flock and the herd;  
their life shall become like a watered garden,  
and they shall never languish again.

Then shall the young women rejoice in the dance,  
and the young men and the old shall be merry.

    I will turn their mourning into joy,

    I will comfort them, and give them gladness for sorrow.

    I will give the priests their fill of fatness,

and my people shall be satisfied with my bounty, says the LORD.

*There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole;*

*There is a balm in Gilead, to heal the sin-sick soul.*

*Sometimes I feel discouraged, and think my work's in vain,*

*But then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.*

*Chorus and v1, "There Is A Balm In Gilead", (Hymn # 792, Glory To God Hymnal)*

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John 1.1-18

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth.

(John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'")

From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ. No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

*Of the Father's love begotten, ere the worlds began to be,  
He is Alpha and Omega; he the source, the ending he,  
Of the things that are, that have been  
And that future years shall see.*

v1, "Of the Father's Love Begotten", (Hymn # 108, Glory To God Hymnal)

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Sick...you took care of me  
Jeremiah 31.7-14  
John 1.1-18

The text from Jeremiah is a prophetic poem announcing the return of the exiles from Babylon to Jerusalem. After decades of despair and separation from their homeland, the opportunity to return to their ancestral homes is sung with great fervor.

Their return is a promise of the LORD: "For thus says the LORD". The people will be gathered "from the land of the north" from "the farthest parts of the earth." Their return will be safe and sure, they shall walk "by brooks of water, in a straight path in which they will not stumble", cared for as a father cares for his children.

The LORD is understood as the one who will redeem the people from the exile, as well as the one who sent them into exile in the first place: "He who scattered Israel will gather him." "For the LORD has ransomed Jacob and has redeemed him from hands too strong for him." And this redemption will be joyful: "they shall be radiant", "their life shall become like a watered garden", "the young women rejoice in the dance, and the young men and the old shall be merry", the LORD will "comfort them, given them gladness for sorrow"; and everyone will be blessed: the priests will have "their full of fatness" because of the resumption of animal sacrifices", and "the people shall be satisfied with the LORD's bounty." Everyone will be blessed. Yes, even "the blind and the lame, those with child and those in labor, a great company, they shall return" to Jerusalem. Presumably, the blind will be assisted by those who can see.

This is one of the themes of the introduction, the Prologue, to John's Gospel, the other text for the second Sunday after Christmas. Given that John has no traditional birth narrative, this poem represents a "birth" narrative in his Gospel. These are familiar words, and the author has deftly drawn parallels between Jesus (not so identified until the end of the poem) and John the Baptist, signifying how John was a gift from God sent to testify to the light of God, Jesus. The text also reflects the resistance within the Jewish community to accept Jesus as God's gift, as God's personification of the Word, to restore God's law.

Not everyone could "see" that this was true. There were persons who were "blind" to what God had done and was doing in the person of Jesus through the passion and purpose of the Holy Spirit. For those who could see and understand, this presence of God was the light that shined in the darkness of Jesus' day and ever since, much as the deliverance from exile was a light that shined in the darkness of Jeremiah's day.

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Sick...you took care of me

From: "Anatomy And Disease" by Alexandra Villa-Forte, MD, MPH, Cleveland Clinic, accessed from [www.merckmanuals.com](http://www.merckmanuals.com).

The human body is remarkably well designed. Most of its organs have a great deal of extra capacity or reserve: They can still function adequately even when damaged. For example, more than two thirds of the liver must be destroyed before serious consequences occur, and a person can actually live with only one lung or one kidney. Other organs can tolerate little damage before they malfunction and symptoms occur, the heart and the brain are examples.

From: "Disease, Illness, Sickness, Health, Healing and Wholeness: Exploring Some Elusive Concepts" by Kenneth M. Boyd, Edinburgh University Medical School, accessed from [mh.bmj.com](http://mh.bmj.com).

Definitions: Dis-ease is literally the absence of ease or elbow room. Today the word is used most commonly without a hyphen to refer to a physical disorder, with synonyms of "illness" and "sickness". "Illness" can be defined as "ill health; the state of being ill" (although older meanings reflect how the word "ill" is a contracted form of "evil") and "sickness" can be defined as "affected by illness, unwell, ailing...".

Another way of understanding them is to define "Disease" as "a pathological process"; "Illness" as "a feeling, an experience of unhealth"; and "Sickness" as "the external and public mode of unhealth."

The World Health Organization defines "health" as "a state of complete physical, mental and social wellbeing, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity." To try to define healthy as simply the absence of disease or infirmity leads to difficulties: ill health cannot be defined simply in terms of disease. Things are even more complicated when assessing mental ill health. "True" wellbeing requires an "essential reference to some conception of the 'good life' for a human being" and "some conception of having a measure of control over one's life, including its social and political divisions."

For religion, wholeness and healing are intimately related. Healing is understood by religion not only as the natural process of tissue regeneration sometimes assisted by medical means, but also as whatever process results in the experience of greater wholeness of the human spirit. Wholeness is always imperfectly realized in the fragmentariness of human experience; and for religion wholeness is discovered most commonly in the mode of expectancy, both in the midst of life and in the face of death.

What is the Spirit inviting us to consider regarding opportunities around health?