

Partners in Health and Wholeness Worship Aid

A Lectionary-Based Resource Illustrating the Spiritual Relevance of Healthy Living

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Introduction

By J. George Reed

Welcome to our worship resources for Partners in Health and Wholeness (PHW). PHW is an ambitious program of the North Carolina Council of Churches designed to help people of faith to see health — their own health — as an issue of faith and to take action that will lead to healthier and more abundant living.

The nationwide obesity epidemic which especially affects NC has serious consequences for both adults and children. Some of the serious health conditions that too often result are diabetes, heart disease, stroke, some cancers, and high blood pressure. While there are a variety of reasons for this epidemic, some of which we have no control over, two of the important causes are our diets and our lack of physical activity— two things over which we do have some control.

Other factors also affect our health: smoking and being exposed to secondhand smoke, inadequate access to health care resources, avoidable falls and other accidents, substance abuse, infectious diseases, environmental exposures, and mental health.

We hope that North Carolina's clergy and other faith leaders will promote and model healthier lifestyles for all of us.

Because this is a worship resource and because we are people who base worship on sacred scriptures, it has been important to us to ground this work in the word of God. When I was growing up, passages from I Corinthians (our bodies as God's temple) were the basis for saying that Christians shouldn't consume alcoholic beverages (I was a Southern Baptist at the time) or smoke tobacco (as you can tell, I was NOT in North Carolina!). Today, I believe that treating my body as God's temple speaks to putting healthier foods into it, not putting in harmful substances, and giving it the exercise that health professionals tell us we should get.

But we looked at great length for the biblical passages which command us to eat less saturated fat, go to the gym to work out each day, and engage in other health-conscious activities. We tried out several passages in looking for scriptural support for healthier lifestyles. We read what others have written. On more than one occasion, Samara Joy Nielsen, a Duke Divinity School student interning with us, raised the issue of eisegesis, pointing out (rightly, I might add) that I was trying to make a passage say something today that it wasn't really intended to say.

While we have ended up with passages which do promote health and wholeness, we have given up on being able to proof-text healthy diets and physical activity. And we've realized that there are at least three reasons why we can't find those "Thou shalt" and "Thou shalt not's":

- 1) People in agrarian societies farming with little or no mechanization don't need to be told to get their exercise. Several biblical passages speak to the labor involved in

farming. Any of us who grew up on farms know how hard that work is. And the few of us who still work the land more or less by hand do not suffer from too little activity and do not need to go to the gym. It's people like me, and probably like many of you reading these words, who spend the whole day behind a desk, in a car, sitting at conference tables – we're the ones who desperately need the message of physical activity.

- 2) People who are relatively poor and live in rural areas — then and now — don't have access to the rich foods which often compromise our health. So, while there are occasional biblical references to rich foods, most people in biblical times would not have had that as an option, eating instead a subsistence diet of fruits, vegetables, grains, and meats that they produced themselves. Salt and sugar were real luxuries. Trans fats and high fructose corn sweeteners were millennia in the future.
- 3) Because of centuries of study by medical and nutritional researchers, we know so much more today than we did just a few decades ago:
 - The links between smoking (direct and secondhand) and a host of serious health problems.
 - The impact of salt consumption on high blood pressure.
 - The relationship between exercise and everything from stroke to diabetes.
 - The difference between dietary fats, with some being good for you, some bad, and some really terrible.
 - The importance of eating whole grains, not refined ones.

So we offer you here a set of worship resources based on scriptural teachings which fit with what we already know about health and nutrition and, I trust, will fit with what we have yet to learn:

- Our bodies as God's temples
- The goodness of God's creation, and especially of the fruits, vegetables, and grains God gave us to eat.
- The importance of justice and, in the health context, of all people having access to health education, good and nutritious food, and basic health care.

“The Plant Yielding Seed”

Focus Scripture One: Genesis 1:1-2:4a

Year A, Trinity Sunday

²⁹God said, ‘See, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed in its fruit; you shall have them for food. ³⁰And to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has the breath of life, I have given every green plant for food.’ And it was so. ³¹God saw everything that he had made, and indeed, it was very good. And there was evening and there was morning, the sixth day (Genesis 1:29-31, NRSV).

PASTORAL REFLECTION

By J. George Reed

As I’ve prepared this message on health and how God wants us to be healthy people, I’ve been searching my Bible for the verse that says “Thou shalt eat five to nine fruits and vegetables daily.” Sadly, I haven’t been able to find it!

But I have found today’s passage, which makes clear that God’s creation included grains and fruits and vegetables and that God intended for them to be sources of nutrition for us. “You shall have them for food.” (I’ll leave to another day the question of whether God’s intention in creation was for us to eat ONLY grains, fruits and vegetables. Clearly by the time the Mosaic laws were written, the Hebrew people had added meat to their diet, because those laws specify which meats were permitted to be eaten.)

The importance of agricultural life was clear in the series of festivals that were part of the Hebrew faith. Festivals that celebrated the first-fruits of the fields and the times of harvest. A festival for the time when trees emerged from their winter sleep and began a new fruit-bearing cycle. These festivals were occasions for joy and gratitude.

Scripture also gives some indication of the rich variety of crops in biblical times — grapes/raisins, figs, pomegranates, olives, dates, barley, wheat, spelt (or rye), lentils, cucumbers, melons, onions, leeks, garlic, mint, and rue.

Modern nutritional science verifies what scripture suggests. God’s gifts to us — in this case, fruits, vegetables, and grains — are good for us. Fruits and vegetables are excellent sources of vitamins and other nutrients. Grains provide complex carbohydrates and fiber. We now know more about the risks of saturated fats and trans fats and the advantages of eating less meat (if we eat meat at all) and of eating more of these God-given sources of nutrition.

What does this mean for us today? First, it means that we are likely to live healthier lives if we eat more grains, fruits and vegetables, while reducing our intake of sugars and unhealthy fats. Doctors tell us that this leads to a reduction in diabetes, cardiovascular disease and a reduction in some cancers. The Bible may not specify five to nine servings of fruits and vegetables per day, but nutritionists do.

Second, it means we can do a better job of modeling good eating habits for our children. According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 16% of children ages 6 to 19 are overweight or obese – a number that has tripled since 1980.

And, third, it means that we should do a better job of feeding ourselves when we come to church to eat. That's why we are glad to see congregations making some changes in what they serve. Some always have healthy fruit and vegetable options, some are serving smaller portions of meat and other fatty foods, and some have water readily available to drink. It doesn't mean that they'll eliminate fried foods, rich casseroles and desserts, and sweet tea (though we'd probably all be healthier if we did). But it does mean that they will be giving themselves healthier options.

When we committed ourselves to follow Jesus, we agreed to live as God would have us live, in all parts of our life. We have the words of the Bible and now we have the words of doctors and nutritionists. As we eat, let's look more to the grains, fruits and vegetables that God has given us from the time of creation.

PRAYERS TO FEED THE SOUL

Prayer¹:

O heavenly Father, who hast filled the world with beauty: Open our eyes to behold thy gracious hand in all thy works; that, rejoicing in thy whole creation, we may learn to serve thee with gladness; for the sake of him through whom all things were made, thy Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Prayer²:

Most gracious God, by whose knowledge the depths are broken up and the clouds drop down the dew: We yield thee hearty thanks and praise for the return of seedtime and harvest, for the increase of the ground and the gathering in of its fruits, and for all the other blessings of thy merciful providence bestowed upon this nation and people. And, we beseech thee, give us a just sense of these great mercies, such as may appear in our lives by a humble, holy, and obedient walking before thee all our days; through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom, with thee and the Holy Ghost be all glory and honor, world without end. Amen.

Call to Confession #1:³

Forgive us, God, for eating too much and not using our bodies enough.

We have been blessed with healthy food and bodies that work wonders, bodies that dance, run and jump.

Forgive us, God, for not eating foods that nourish our bodies and enjoying the wonders of your creation.

¹ Book of Common Prayer (BCP) 1979, 814.

² BCP 1979, 840.

³ written by Samara Joy Nielsen

We have been blessed with fruits and vegetables that give us the vitamins and nutrients we need and beautiful surroundings to explore by walking through God's creation.

Help us, God, to change our ways.

Loving God, help us to revel in your creation. Help us to explore healthy fruits, vegetables, grains and seeds which you have given us for our sustenance and edification. Help us to explore new forests, seashores, beaches and mountains that we might exercise our bodies and learn more about the earth and all its blessings.

Prayer⁴:

We give you thanks and praise, O God of creation, for the grandeur of all that you have made, saying We thank you, God.

For the healing waters of creation, which bring pleasure and health, purity and life, We thank you, God.

For the richness of the good Earth that brings forth fruits and flowers, a pleasure to taste and a joy to behold, We thank you, God.

For the soaring birds of the air, the crawling creatures on the Earth, the gliding fishes in the seas, for all creatures great and small with whom we share this precious web of life, We thank you, God.

For the invigorating sunlight of day, the deepening mystery of night, the wonder of the stars, and the call of the unknown in the universe, We thank you, God.

From heedless misuse and dishonoring of the wonders of your hand, Good Lord deliver us.

From squandering resources, abusing our companion species, and polluting the habitat we all share, Good Lord deliver us.

From the folly of imagining ourselves free from the fate of your whole creation, Good Lord deliver us.

For the courage and wisdom to confess how little we have cared for your gifts,

⁴ <http://www.earthministry.org/resources/worship-aids/prayers/prayers#prayers-of-the-people>
(From St. Thomas Episcopal Church, Medina, Washington.)

Strengthen us, O Spirit.

For the conviction that you have called us to love and restore the Earth, Strengthen us, O Spirit.

For repentance and the determination to begin our stewardship anew, Strengthen us, O Spirit.

O merciful Creator, your hand is open wide to satisfy the needs of every living creature: Make us always thankful for your loving providence; and grant that we, remembering the account that we must one day give, may be faithful stewards of your good gifts; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who with you and the Holy Spirit lives and reigns, one God, forever and ever, Amen.

Prayer⁵:

Generous God, you have blessed us with the resources to share the good news of your love for all creation. We dedicate these gifts and pray that they may bring healing, wholeness, and hope to the world, that future generations may also know your graciousness and love. Amen.

⁵ NCC Offertory Prayer (From the National Council of Churches [NCC] Earth Day Sunday 2002 resource packet, "Caring for Creation: Making the World Safe for Children." To download this resource, go to <http://www.ncccojustice.org/EarthDay/2002/index.html>.)

“A Healing Touch”

Focus Scripture Two: Mark 1:29-39, NRSV

Year B, Fifth Sunday after the Epiphany

²⁹As soon as they left the synagogue, they entered the house of Simon and Andrew, with James and John. ³⁰Now Simon’s mother-in-law was in bed with a fever, and they told him about her at once. ³¹He came and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then the fever left her, and she began to serve them. ³²That evening, at sunset, they brought to him all who were sick or possessed with demons. ³³And the whole city was gathered around the door. ³⁴And he cured many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and he would not permit the demons to speak, because they knew him. ³⁵In the morning, while it was still very dark, he got up and went out to a deserted place, and there he prayed. ³⁶And Simon and his companions hunted for him. ³⁷When they found him, they said to him, ‘Everyone is searching for you.’ ³⁸He answered, ‘Let us go on to the neighbouring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out to do.’ ³⁹And he went throughout Galilee, proclaiming the message in their synagogues and casting out demons.

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

By Samara Joy Nielsen

Mark 1:29-31 is a healing story and 1:32-34 is a summary. The healing of Peter’s mother-in-law in 1:29-31 is linked closely with the previous passage of the exorcism in the Capernaum synagogue.⁶ This story is a classic healing narrative:⁷
Description of illness: “She had a fever.”

Request for healing: “They told him about her.”

Healing touch: “Coming forward, he grasped her hand and raised her up.”

Accomplishment of cure: “The fever left her.”

Demonstration of cure: “She began serving them.”⁸

In this passage, Mark may be drawing attention to Jesus’ charismatic touch. This is the same expression used in the Septuagint for God grasping the hand of God’s chosen one [Isa 42:6; Ps 72(73):23]. Even more important is the verb used when Jesus lifts her from her sickbed: *egeiren* – raised. This same verb is used in the raising of the dead girl in Mark 5:41-42. Mark’s audience would also have been reminded of the general resurrection of the dead. The connection between healing and resurrection has roots in pre-Christian Judaism. Mark’s intent is most likely to link healing with God’s eschatological power used to raise Jesus from the dead.⁹

Furthermore, the fever leaving the woman parallels the earlier unclean spirit departing. The healed woman’s serving is reminiscent of Mark 1:13 where the angels support Jesus during his testing by Satan.¹⁰ The woman’s service to Jesus now leads

⁶ Marcus, Joel, *Mark 1-8: The Anchor Bible* (volume 27 Doubleday NY; 2000), 198.

⁷ Bultmann, Rudolf, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition* (Harper and Row NY; 1963), 221-226.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 199.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

to Jesus serving the people. Peter's house is now a public site of healing. Now the people of Capernaum bring the afflicted to Jesus so Jesus can heal them too. These healings occur at the end of Sabbath which shows that reverence for Jesus is not necessarily incompatible with the Jewish Sabbath. The observant people of Capernaum wait for the sun to go down and THEN bring the afflicted to Jesus to be healed.¹¹

The end of the Sabbath is also important because the Havdalah service at the end of the Jewish Sabbath is a celebration of God's creation of the world. Some think it is associated with the fight against demons and other magical procedures. This background therefore shows a precedent for Jesus' eschatological re-creation by healing at Peter's house at the conclusion of the Sabbath.¹²

There is secrecy implied in v. 34 in Jesus' rebuke of demons which is reinforced in v. 35 when Jesus also separates himself from his disciples. Verses 35-39 conclude Jesus' exorcism at the Capernaum synagogue (1:21-28) and the healings and exorcisms at Peter's house (1:29-34).¹³

Early in the morning Jesus leaves his disciples (v. 35), then they find him and he tells them that the next step is to go elsewhere. This passage can be seen as a pronouncement story because Jesus reveals his reason for coming forward. Jesus goes off to pray by himself. Jesus' disciples are alarmed and pursue him. His disciples say that everyone is looking for him. Jesus is persistent in not returning to the scene and moving on to what He has been called to do, which is to preach in nearby towns.¹⁴

This "came forward" can be read in two ways, going to the next town and also Jesus "coming"- the reason for his entire ministry. This preaching ministry can be likened to Amos, but also encompassed in this coming is the coming of Jesus to fight against demons. Therefore we see a very close relationship between preaching of good news and exorcism of demons.¹⁵ The conclusion of this passage shows Jesus' ministry extending to all of Galilee.¹⁶

PASTORAL REFLECTION **"The Two Storehouses"**

By Jack McKinney, former pastor of Pullen Memorial Baptist Church, Raleigh

Imagine a world where all the food is kept in two storehouses. In order to get food when you become hungry, you have to get in the line that leads to the storehouses. The storehouse on the left has better food than the storehouse on the right. The food is healthier for you, it tastes delicious, and it is less expensive than the food in the right-side storehouse. Of course, everyone would prefer to get food from the storehouse on the left, but there is a catch. You have to have a little card when you get to the front of the line. The card grants you immediate access into the better storehouse of food. If you don't have a card, you must wait to get into the inferior storehouse.

¹¹ Ibid., 200.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid., 202.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid., 204.

¹⁶ Ibid., 205.

Sometimes, even if you are very hungry and have waited for many hours, you still cannot get food from the storehouse on the right. There are no guarantees because you don't have a card.

So, of course, the biggest question in this imaginary world is how do you get one of those cards? Is it based on how hungry you are? No, in fact the people who have a card for the better food storehouse are much less hungry than the people who have no card. Well, if it is not based on need, can you earn a card by working particularly hard for it? No, people who have cards and people who don't have cards both work hard. There is no formula for earning a card by how hard you work. In fact, the group of people who have no card often work at jobs that demand more physical labor so they tend to be more hungry. Even so, such factors do not determine who receives a card. So, you may wonder, if receiving a card for cheaper, quality food is not based on need, and it's not based on how hard you work for it, what determines who gets one of these precious cards? It's hard to say, really, but one thing is clear. The less you need the card the more likely you are to get it. If you have a lot of money and could actually afford to buy food from the more expensive storehouse, you are almost guaranteed a card so you can buy food at the cheaper storehouse. It might sound counterintuitive, but that's how it works in this imaginary world.

And if all of that sounds a tad unfair, you haven't heard the worst of it yet. For those who have no card, who are the poorest and hungriest people in line, often grow so weary of this system that they just starve to death. For you see, they know that when they get to the front of the line it doesn't mean they will get food. It usually means they will just have to wait longer. And if they do get into the inferior storehouse, they will have to pay ten or twenty or thirty times more for the food than the people in the good storehouse are paying. And they can't afford that, so they just don't get in line. Those who persist, who will not let their lack of a card prevent them from receiving food, often suffer many humiliations. They are discriminated against for not having a card. They are questioned about the legitimacy of their hunger. In order to receive food at the more expensive, inferior storehouse they must be in an obvious crisis. You must be almost starving to death to get food at the inferior storehouse, but sometimes, because you have to wait until you are starving to death, even the food you eventually get doesn't help. Even if the food distributors run next door and get some of the quality food at the left-hand storehouse, and try to save your life with it, it doesn't always help. The system itself leads to death for those without a card for food.

Every once in awhile in this imaginary world, some fair-minded, compassionate people look at this food delivery system and cry out in anger. They wonder how their leaders could allow such a system that is blatantly discriminatory, that denies many citizens of that land something as essential as food. How can we let people starve to death, they ask, when there is enough food in the storehouses to feed them all? Shouldn't our government provide everyone with a card for food, they wonder? Any system would make more sense than this one, they scream. At the very least, they cry out, make sure all children of this land have a food card.

But the leaders, when confronted with these complaints, simply throw their hands up in despair. They say it is a problem of economics. If we give everyone a food card, then there will be a recession. If we give just the children a food card, we will have to raise taxes. And because the people who already have the food cards control the

government, and hate the idea of more taxes, the government doesn't do anything. They wring their hands and agree it's not fair, and it's a shame that people without cards starve to death, and oh how they wish they could do something, but they can't. It's not realistic. The radicals who demand food cards for everyone are brushed off as naïve utopians who don't understand the complexities of the system.

And there is one more very strange facet to the food delivery system in this imaginary world. The food in the right-side storehouse that is of a lesser quality, is much more expensive, and is distributed in a way that is so random that it often leads to death, well, that food is paid for by all the people of the land, including those with food cards. That's right. They all pay for this expensive, lesser quality food that might or might not get to the starving people rather than simply giving everyone a food card. I know it makes little sense, but that's just the way things are in this strange land.

What is this imaginary world called where some have cards for food and some don't; where one storehouse contains quality, cheaper food, and one storehouse contains expensive, inferior food; where there is enough food in the storehouses for everyone, but not everyone has access to it; where the leaders of this diabolical system insist there is nothing they can do to make sure everyone has access to enough food? What is the name of this imaginary land?

It is the United States of America. And it is not imaginary. The only difference is the storehouses are filled with health care instead of food. And this system that would deny so many something as basic as decent care for the body and mind is a scandal. It is especially a scandal in a so-called Christian nation where so many claim to follow the teachings of Jesus. After all, Jesus' first mission in Mark 1 was to provide healing to poor and sick and desperate souls. In other words, Jesus healed the people with no card.

PRAYERS TO FEED THE SOUL

Prayer¹⁷:

O blessed Lord, you ministered to all who came to you: Look with compassion upon all who through addiction have lost their health and freedom. Restore to them the assurance of your unfailing mercy; remove from them the fears that beset them; strengthen them in the work of their recovery; and to those who care for them, give patient understanding and persevering love. Amen.

Prayer¹⁸:

Lord Christ, when you came among us, you proclaimed the kingdom of God in villages, towns, and lonely places: Grant that your presence and power may be known throughout this land. Have mercy upon all of us who live and work in rural areas; and grant that all the people of our nation may give thanks to you for food and drink and all other bodily necessities of life, respect those who labor to produce them, and honor the land and the water from which these good things come. All this we ask in your holy

¹⁷ BCP 1979, 831.

¹⁸ BCP 1979, 825.

Name. Amen.

Prayer¹⁹:

O God, we give thanks for our bodies.

We thank you for muscle, bone and blood; for each strength, each unique shape, each intricate organ. As we eat this week, open our mouths to the aromas, the textures, the tastes of nourishing food. Shape our appetites to fit the needs of our bodies. Amen.

Prayer²⁰:

Leader: For the gift of life and a place at the banquet of life,

Response: Let us always be thankful!

Leader: For America's heritage of land and abundant resources,

Response: Let us always be thankful!

Leader: For the bread on our tables and the bread on our altars which sustains our life,

Response: Let us always be thankful!

Leader: For our families and the security their love gives us,

Response: Let us always be thankful!

Leader: For the blessings of a bountiful harvest and economic security,

Response: Let us always be thankful!

Leader: For the prophets and peacemakers everywhere in the world,

Response: Let us always be thankful!

¹⁹ Schrock, Jennifer Halteman, *Just Eating Leader's Guide: Practicing Our Faith at the Table*, (Advocate Health Care, Church World Service and PCUSA, 2005), adapted from Lesson 2 Closing Prayer, 29.

²⁰ Litany of Thanks from National Catholic Rural Life Conference, www.ncrlc.com

“The Body, the Temple of God”

Focus Scripture Three: I Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-23

Year A, Seventh Sunday after the Epiphany

¹⁰ According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. ¹⁶ Do you not know that you are God’s temple and that God’s Spirit dwells in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God’s temple, God will destroy that person. For God’s temple is holy, and you are that temple (I Corinthians 3:10-11, 16-17, NRSV).

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

By Samara Joy Nielsen

In both Judaism and Christianity, humans are made in God’s image and are where God’s Spirit dwells. God said, “Let us make humans in our image, after our likeness” (Genesis 1:26).

We are God’s Temple, meaning that God’s Spirit dwells within us. In the Old Testament, God is present within Israel as a shining glory in the Jerusalem temple. God dwells in the midst of his people. In the New Testament, God now dwells in the midst of God’s gathered people.²¹

In Paul’s epistle to the Corinthians, he is not telling them something new by calling them a temple of God. All Christians together form one vast temple...not “you are temples” but “you are *the* temple”. No literal temple is recognized in the New Testament. The spiritual temple is the body of Christ where the Holy Spirit resides. The synagogue was the model of the Christian house of worship, not the temple. The temple was God’s dwelling place.²²

Paul resumes his argument on his earlier allusion about being God’s building in v. 9. In looking at other parts of this letter it becomes apparent that there were false teachers in Corinth who taught false doctrine. Paul classifies the false doctrine as corrupting, polluting and destroying the church. The church was a building for God and should be kept pure and holy. The passage can be taken to mean either the Spirit of God dwells in the church of Corinth collectively or in every single believer. Christian churches are temples of God and each Christian is a living temple of God. God dwelt in the Jewish temple and now Christ dwells in all believers by the Holy Spirit. The temple was consecrated to God and set apart for service to God. Also, Christians are set apart for God and God’s service. If we are God’s temple then we cannot do anything to

²¹ Findlayson, Bryan, Lectionary Bible Studies and Sermons, Pumpkin Cottage Ministry Resources.

²² Faussett, A.R., The First Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Corinthians Commentary *Commentary on the Whole Bible* (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown, 1871).

alienate God or corrupt or pollute ourselves. Christians, as God's temple, should be pure and clean and should carefully avoid anything that will defile God's temple.²³

PASTORAL REFLECTION

“How will you respond? – Our responsibility to our temples”

By Jocleen McCall, Religion Instructor, Johnston Community College, former Associate Pastor of First Baptist Church, Fayetteville

My initial look at this passage left me in a conundrum. How in the world was I going to relate this passage to health and wholeness? Paul is talking about division in the church, immaturity and what the life of faith directs us to do. That is when it clicked for me. The life of faith is more than simply being kind to my neighbors, showing the love of God and spreading the good news of Jesus Christ. The same life of faith that tells me that the body is God's temple, demands that every individual do whatever is necessary to take care of that temple to the best of their ability.

In 1 Corinthians 3:10-11, Paul makes it clear that we have the responsibility of building on the foundation that Christ provided. In writing to the church at Corinth, Paul proclaims that he has laid the only foundation that will stand, that of Jesus Christ. He also makes it clear that it is our responsibility to choose carefully what we build on that foundation.

This passage is found within a chapter that talks about divisions in the church; jealousy, quarreling and factions or cliques. Unfortunately, there is another division that is occurring within our congregations that remains primarily unaddressed. It is the division between those who live healthy lifestyles and those who do not. We consistently hear sermons on being a good neighbor and showing the love of Christ, but rarely do we talk about how we are treating ourselves. If we listen to the news, we will hear the following...

- Fully two-thirds of U.S. adults are officially overweight, and about half of those have graduated to full-blown obesity. The rates for African Americans and Latinos are even higher. Among kids between 6 and 19 years old, 15%, or 1 in 6, are overweight, and another 15% are headed that way. Even our pets are pudgy: a depressing 25% of dogs and cats are heavier than they should be.²⁴
- It's been estimated that as many as 90% of doctor's visits are for symptoms that are at least partially stress-related!²⁵
- Additionally, failing to get enough sleep or sleeping at odd hours heightens the risk for a variety of major illnesses, including cancer, heart disease, diabetes and obesity.²⁶

²³ Browne, Simon, *First Corinthians: An Exposition, with Practical Observations, of the First Epistle of St. Paul to the Corinthians*.

²⁴ http://www.time.com/time/subscriber/covers/1101040607/article/how_we_grew_so_big_diet01a.html

²⁵ <http://stress.about.com/od/stresshealth/a/stresshealth.htm>

²⁶ <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/10/08/AR2005100801405.html>

With these statistics, it appears that we have to ask...What are we doing to our temples?

Paul goes on to mention some building materials that were common to his time. The focus here is not that one material is better than another but that everyone has building materials available to them. If we shift from Paul's architectural metaphor to the building materials for the human body, we see that grains, vegetables, fruits, calcium-rich foods, water and rest are all materials that are available to all of us. We simply have to make the careful choice. Paul states that "the work of each builder will become visible"...no truer statement has ever been made. We will not have to wait until the "Day" when Christ returns to see the results. We are seeing the results of what we are putting into our temples more and more every day. Listen to the statistics. Listen to our doctors. Take a look in the mirror. Look around you...at your family, your friends, your colleagues, your church members. Do the majority of our bodies bring glory to the one and only God?

Another overall theme in this passage is that of working together. Are we working together to help each other build strong temples? Maybe, maybe not. Some of us might want to consider "chicken pickins" as opposed to "pig pickins" or seafood broils over fish fries. Do we have to have high calorie desserts at every function? Does our tea have to be sweet enough to send the average person into a diabetic coma? Do we have to use the same 20% of our members to do 80% of the work? Are we providing opportunities for improvement? Are we at least providing options? Are we giving those who work very hard in our congregations adequate time for rest?

The bottom line is that we are God's temple. How can we serve our Lord in our current shape? Why are we willing to give less than our best to God? How can we run this race to the finish if we can barely run 20 feet?

We don't have to wait until the tests, trials and fires come. Yes, all of these things can destroy us, but they can also purify us. We can start purifying and fortifying our temples right now. We can start slowly, as Paul did by feeding the Corinthian Christians milk. We can choose carefully to substitute the good for the bad...drink an extra glass of water each day, eat a piece of fruit instead of the chocolate bar or high sodium snack, eat an extra serving of vegetables and one less starch a few times a week, leave the computer off one night a week, turn the television off at night or take it out of the bedroom. It is up to us to decide where we will start. It is up to us to choose how we will start. The important thing is to start. We can do this!

We have much work to do in this day and age. We need each and every able bodied Christian. Are we able? Paul also speaks of a reward for what is built on the foundation if it survives. He makes it clear that our salvation is not at stake but if our buildings burn up, we will suffer. Is that really what we want because we have chosen not to attend to our Temples? I imagine that we are all looking forward to that great day when we are with God. What will your response be if God asks you how you treated the temple over which you were given dominion?

PRAYERS TO FEED THE SOUL

Prayer²⁷:

O God, in the course of this busy life, give us times of refreshment and peace; and grant that we may so use our leisure to rebuild our bodies and renew our minds, that our spirits may be opened to the goodness of your creation; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Responsive Prayer²⁸:

I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh. Ezek 36:26

Into the warmth of your presence we come, Lord God

All: With the offerings of our praise, our worship, our prayers and our lives.

Into the warmth of your presence we come, Lord God

All: Freed from the distractions of the world, free to meditate on your word.

Into the warmth of your presence we come, Lord God

All: To be blessed by the depth of your love and the warmth of this fellowship.

It is good to be here, Lord; good to be in fellowship with each other; good to know the presence of your Spirit in this place; good to know that you are here with us, listening, prompting, touching lives, healing, renewing, making us whole.

Call to Confession #2²⁹:

Forgive us, God, for forgetting...

We have been created in God's image.

Forgive us for misusing our bodies.

Our bodies are God's gifts to us.

God help us to properly care for our bodies.

Our bodies are wonderfully made; our bodies are temples of God to be honored.

Forgive us for not honoring Your creation.

²⁷ BCP 1979, 825.

²⁸ <http://www.faithandworship.com/liturgy11.htm>

²⁹ written by Samara Joy Nielsen

God, help us to be attentive to our bodies' needs. Help us to love and respect our bodies.

Responsive Prayer³⁰:

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke's Gospel: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed."

All: "The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not be in want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside still waters, he restores my soul"

This is the God we serve. A God of love, of healing and power.

All: Alleluia

This is the God we serve. A God who loves us with a Parent's love.

All: Alleluia

A God who laughs as we laugh, and suffers as we suffer

All: Alleluia

A God whose touch brings not only healing but wholeness

All: Alleluia

Responsive Prayer³¹:

Remind us that Jesus healed all who came to him. That Jesus came to make broken lives whole. Forgive us for our unbelief. Accept our mustard seed of faith, for that is often all we have to offer in times of sorrow or distress.

In a moment of quiet reflection we bring to God our incompleteness, our hurts, our pains, our fears and unbelief (silence)

O Lord our Shepherd

All: Lead me beside the still waters that restore my soul.

O Lord our Saviour

³⁰ <http://www.faithandworship.com/liturgy12.htm>

³¹ <http://www.faithandworship.com/liturgy12.htm>

All: Give release from the fears, uncertainties and unease of this life

O Lord our healer

All: Touch our lives as only you can touch them and flood them with the power of your Spirit.

In a moment of quiet reflection we remember the compassion, humility and selfless love shown by Jesus (silence)

This is the God we serve. A God who wants us to enjoy His presence; a God who brings wholeness and healing into lives that are incomplete.

All: Alleluia

“Jesus Christ, the Healer”

Focus Scripture Four: Acts 4:8-12, NRSV

Year B, Fourth Sunday of Easter

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, ‘Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, ¹⁰let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹This Jesus is “the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.” ¹²There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.’

SCRIPTURE COMMENTARY

By Samara Joy Nielsen

Many of the pericopes in Acts are taken from speeches. These speeches are usually built around Old Testament passages and are addressed to Jews.³² In Acts 4:8-12, Peter is defending himself before the Sanhedrin. According to Luke, the Sadducees oppose Peter’s preaching. They are irritated that the apostles are preaching about Jesus’ resurrection. Unlike Peter’s denial of Jesus three times at his trial, Peter’s speech at the Sanhedrin can be characterized as fearless. Peter, like the other apostles, is a new person. The timid apostles are now bold testifiers of the Gospel through the Holy Spirit. Peter testifies confidently of the salvation and redemption through Jesus Christ.³³

In verse 8, Peter is respectful and deferential to the public officials. However, not only is he respectful in front of the Sanhedrin, he is also very bold. This profound change in Peter as well as other apostles began at Christ’s resurrection and culminated after Pentecost. We can attribute Peter’s surety and boldness as a result of being filled with the Holy Spirit. However, in verses 9-10, Peter charges the Sanhedrin with murdering God’s Son and also testifies that God raised Him from the dead. Peter is testifying that the healing is indeed in Christ. Peter was present when Jesus first used the prophecy of the rejected stone becoming the cornerstone. Jesus refers to this in Matthew 21:42 but the prophecy comes from Psalm 118:22. This prophecy was based upon an incident connected with the building of the temple. In verse 11, Peter throws this back in the Sanhedrin’s face – because they are rejecting Jesus – who is the cornerstone. In verse 12, Peter’s declaration is universal. Peter states that everyone that is saved will be saved in the name of Christ.³⁴

³² Juel, Donald “Texts In Context” Acts and the Easter Season (Word and World, Luther Northwestern Theological Seminary, St. Paul, Minnesota, 1985), 206.

³³ Ibid., 210.

³⁴ Coffman Commentaries on the Old and New Testament
<http://www.searchgodsword.org/com/bcc/view.cgi?book=ac&chapter=004>

PASTORAL REFLECTION

By Steve Hickle, Pastor, Fairmont United Methodist Church, Raleigh

The Bible is rich in “types,” as if heaven’s own central casting named the many for their dramatic roles. Moses, for instance, as God’s anointed is reprised by Elijah, who in turn is played by Elisha and others in the prophetic succession. Finally, Jesus comes along, but he breaks out of any semblance of type-casting, becoming the measure of all who take the stage. He doesn’t just part the waters, he walks on them; he doesn’t rely on manna from heaven but becomes that bread come down from heaven, the very bread of life; and rather than have merely one healing under his sash, he becomes the essential Healer. What then?

My reading of Acts leads me to believe that the church, that is, the body of believers formed and energized by the Holy Spirit, takes up the role of Jesus. It is readily evident in characters, such as St. Stephen, who on the verge of being stoned to death can cry out with Jesus, “Lord, do not hold this sin against them” (Acts 7:60). But it is also evident in the body as a whole, the church.

In the first post-Pentecost, post-church-birthing passage of The Acts of the Apostles, Peter and John head for the Temple. Observant Jews that they were, not yet separated from the ancestral faith, it was for them the hour of prayer. There’s that Jesus-like custom of being in the Temple. And, reminiscent of that pool-side man (38 years’ worth), they witness a man being carried in on a stretcher. It’s clear that he has come not to worship, much less for healing, but for his day’s work of begging. Asking for alms was like giving the faithful the opportunity to give as they were called to give, right?

Peter looked at the man and invited him to look him in the eye. No, I don’t have any change, spare or otherwise, but here’s what I do have: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk. He was up like a shot, and danced his way through the Temple, and don’t you know, all the way home. From some old place, there comes this children’s song...

*Peter and John went to pray, they met a lame man on the way,
He held out his palm and asked for an alm, and this is what Peter did say:
Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee.
In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.
He went walking and leaping and praising God!
Walking and leaping and praising God!
In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.*

The plot thickens when the Sadducees get enough of all this. You remember them. Unlike the Pharisees, the denizens of the synagogues, this Temple crowd did not believe in life after death. And this teaching in the name of a dead man, well, it was just too much. So it was off to the slammer for them. It will be the formerly stumbling Peter, who articulates the gospel for them all. Is there a problem? Is it that there is a man here who was sick and has now been healed? Be assured, he is made well by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the one and the same whom you crucified.

The real problem is that Peter and the others can claim a kind of street cred – yes, that’s what we’re teaching, and yes, here’s an example of what that means. For real. The Book of Acts and the rest of the New Testament give further testimony to that inspired First Church’s claim of Jesus the Healer.

Twenty centuries later, the church is seeking the same inspiration, the in-breaking of the same Spirit, in the midst of the debate on health care reform. Numerous voices demand that we state our business: just what business does the church have in the debate? What is our standing, our “cred?” Writing in Faith in Action³⁵, Meredith Hoxie says,

What distinguishes this work as ministry of social justice is that we have received this transcendent call to bear the image of God. Our call is to bear the Imago Dei and to honor it in our fellow humanity. We all bear God’s image. And in this, we are one.

It has been suggested that the Sadducees were significantly more aristocratic than their “rural” counterparts, the Pharisees. To put that into the mix is to revisit not just the disciples’ teaching, but also the matter that one of the temple’s regular beggars has been broken out of his predicament – which, according to the casuists, he undoubtedly deserved! Link his new freedom to teaching that is rooted in the resurrected One, and we begin to hear the grinding of teeth.

I find it powerful to discover in that so direct a connection with Jesus’ sense of “the least of these” (e.g., Matthew 25:31-46). He got the “who do you think you are?” question, so did the disciples. He healed, they healed – in his name. He sought to bring those from the margins into the middle, so did First Church, Jerusalem.

I share the faith tradition of Ms. Hoxie, which she reminds me claims “health care as a basic human right, not a commodity that can be afforded by some and denied to others.” That appears to be downright Petrine and Johannine, if one takes at face value the episode in Acts 3-4.

If the image of a kind of “divine central casting” works, the church now has an important and powerful role to reprise. For the 21st century church, healing is staged in ways that embrace body, mind and spirit. We do all we can among those within our reach. But it is also ours to bear witness to the powers that are that can and will make a difference. Peter, John, well done!

³⁵ Faith In Action, on-line newsletter of the United Methodist General Board of Church and Society, July 6, 2009. Meredith Hoxie is a native of Burlington, NC, and a student at Boston University School of Theology and an intern at GBCS, Washington, DC.

Additional Scriptures

Jeremiah 17:14

Heal me, O Lord, and I shall be healed; save me, and I shall be saved; for you are my praise.

Mark 6:56

And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

Psalm 80:3, 7, 19; Year C, Proper 15 (20)

Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Restore us, O God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Restore us, O Lord God of hosts; let your face shine, that we may be saved.

Exodus 23:25

You shall worship the Lord your God, and I will bless your bread and your water; and I will take sickness away from among you.

Quotes

We are living in a world today where lemonade is made from artificial flavors and furniture polish is made from real lemons. ~Alfred E. Newman

If junk food is the devil, then a sweet orange is as scripture. ~Audrey Foris

Sugar is a type of bodily fuel, yes, but your body runs about as well on it as a car would. ~V.L. Allineare

Water is the most neglected nutrient in your diet but one of the most vital. ~Kelly Barton

Sharing food with another human being is an intimate act that should not be indulged in lightly. ~M. F. K. Fisher

The greatest wealth is health. ~Virgil

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being, and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. ~World Health Organization, 1948

The longer I live, the less confidence I have in drugs and the greater is my confidence in the regulation and administration of diet and regimen. ~John Redman Coxe, 1800

Adam and Eve ate the first vitamins, including the package. ~E.R. Squibb

It's no coincidence that four of the six letters in health are 'heal.' ~Ed Northstrum

Key Facts and Figures

The good news about fruits and vegetables³⁶:

Eating fruits and vegetables is important to your health because they:

- Lower the risk of diabetes
- Reduce high blood pressure
- Lower the risk of some cancers
- Lower the risk of heart disease and stroke
- Help with weight management

What else can you do to eat more healthily?³⁷

- Choose low fat or skim milk instead of whole milk
- Drink water instead of sugar-sweetened beverages
- Choose whole grain and low fat breads and pastas instead of regular breads and pastas
- Instead of frying chicken or meat, grill or bake it
- Try cooking a lower fat or lower calorie version of your favorite foods
- Choose low sodium beverages, vegetables and soups
- Eat smaller portions of food

What can we, as a church, do to be healthier?

- Offer water in place of sugared drinks at all church functions
- Serve fruit for dessert instead of cake, cookies or pies
- Serve meat that is grilled or baked instead of fried
- Provide children and youth with healthy snacks at all youth events
- Offer cooking demonstrations or workshops to promote healthy eating

DID YOU KNOW...?

In 2007:

- Only 44% of adults were getting the recommended amount of physical activity.³⁸
- Only 44% of high school students and 55% of middle school students met

³⁶ National Cancer Institute (2004). *Body and Soul: A Celebration of Healthy Eating & Living, A Guide for Running the Program in Your Church*. Bethesda, MD.

³⁷ Adapted from Physical Activity and Nutrition Branch, 2004. *African-American Churches Eating Smart and Moving More: A Planning and Resource Guide*. NC DHHS, NC Division of Public Health, Raleigh NC.

³⁸ NCDHHS, DPH, SCHS, Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Data, 2007.
www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/data/brfss.cfm.

physical activity recommendations.³⁹

- Over one-third (35.5%) of children ages 16-17 were either overweight or obese.⁴⁰
- Nearly two-thirds (64.6%) of adults were either overweight or obese.⁴¹

According to U.S. health officials:⁴²

- Adults should get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity 5 or more days per week OR at least 20 minutes of vigorous physical activity 3 or more days per week. Children and teenagers need at least 60 minutes of physical activity every day or most days.

The health benefits of physical activity:⁴³

- Reduces your risk of heart disease and stroke, diabetes, and some cancers
- Helps you maintain a healthy weight
- Helps to lower bad (LDL) cholesterol and raise good (HDL) cholesterol
- Helps to prevent and lower high blood pressure
- Strengthens bones and improves muscle strength and endurance
- Reduces the risk of osteoporosis and fractures
- Improves concentration and creativity
- Reduces stress, anxiety and frustration

The impact of smoking:⁴⁴

- The number one cause of preventable death in the U.S. is cigarette smoking.
- In 2006, tobacco products killed over 5 million people worldwide.
- The primary cause of U.S fire deaths are cigarettes and other smoking materials.
- Cigarette smoke contains 11 known cancer causing compounds and 3 poisons: benzene, arsenic and cyanide.

...in NC:

- 22.9% of the adult population smokes.⁴⁵
- North Carolina has higher adult smoking rates than the United States as a whole.⁴⁶
- Overall tobacco use by high school students has declined; however, smokeless tobacco use has stayed the same.⁴⁷

³⁹ Youth Risk Behavior Survey (YRBS), 2007.

⁴⁰ NCDHHS, DPH, SCHS, *North Carolina Child Health Assessment and Monitoring Program Data*, 2007.

⁴¹ NCDHHS, DPH, SCHS, *Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System Data*, 2007.
www.schs.state.nc.us/SCHS/data/brfss.cfm.

⁴² http://www.mypyramid.gov/pyramid/physical_activity_amount.html.

⁴³ www.eatsmartmovemorenc.com.

⁴⁴ www.thetruth.com/facts/.

⁴⁵ BRFSS 2007.

⁴⁶ NC Prevention Report Card, 2009 Update, May 2009, NC Prevention Partners.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

- All North Carolina public schools and acute-care hospitals have 100% tobacco-free policies.⁴⁸

What can people of faith do to reduce the impact of smoking in NC?

- Make your home, church, workplace and car smoke free and tobacco free.
- Encourage others not to smoke or use tobacco products.
- Set a good example by not smoking or using tobacco products.
- Sponsor smoking cessation classes at your church.
- Create and lead support groups.

⁴⁸ American Hospital Association, Annual Survey, 2007.

Health and Wholeness Hymns

| Hymn | NC (HTL) | CH | UMH | PH | STF | AAH | LBW | ELW | EH | AME | MBW | CME | BH | WR | LEVASII | GC |
|---|--------------|-----|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|---------|-----|
| All Praise to You, Creator God | 100 (15) | 43 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| Heal Me, Hands of Jesus | | | 262 | | | | | | | | | | | 636 | | |
| Joys are Flowing Like a River (Blessed Quietness) | 284 (227) | 267 | | | 2142 | 374 | | | | 200 | | 122 | | | 185 | |
| O Christ the Healer | 175 (402) | 503 | 265 | 380 | | | 360 | 610 | | | | | | 638 | | |
| There is a Balm in Gilead | 553 (400) | 501 | 375 | 394 | | 524 | | 614 | 676 | 425 | 500 | | 119 | 631 | 203 | 648 |
| We Yearn O Christ For Wholeness | 179 (395) | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

NC: New Century Hymnal (UCC)

HTL: Hymns of Truth and Light (UCC)

CH: Chalice Hymnal (Disciples of Christ)

UMH: United Methodist Hymnal

PH: Presbyterian Hymnal

STF: Sing the Faith (Presbyterian Supplement)

AAH: African American Heritage Hymnal

LBW: Lutheran Book of Worship (1978 Green Cover)

ELW: Evangelical Lutheran Worship (2006 Cranberry)

EH: Episcopal Hymnal (1982)

AME: African Methodist Episcopal Hymnal

AMEZ: African Methodist Episcopal Zion Hymnal (1957)

MBW: Moravian Book of Worship (1995)

CME: Christian Methodist Episcopal (1987)

BH: Baptist Hymnal (2008)

WR: Worship and Rejoice (2001)

LEVASII: Lift Every Voice and Sing II

GC: Gather Comprehensive (1994)