

1) Sooner or later, one way or another, all of us need healing.

Our bodies, minds, spirits are afflicted—diseased—wounded.  
The affliction often brings not only pain; but suffering—  
a sense of anguish about pain that won't go away—  
pain that seems as though it ought not be.

We want both pain and suffering over and done.

We yearn for recovery and release—we long for healing.  
It is perfectly natural to think of healing as synonymous with CURING.

But, though they ARE RELATED, healing and curing are not the SAME.  
Curing means resolving—removing—eradicating the condition that afflicts us.  
Healing, however, has less to do with ERADICATING than with REVITALIZING—  
with finding ourselves carried through our brokenness toward a new wholeness.  
To be cured is to be returned to life as it was.

To be healed is to be transposed into a new way of living.  
Being CURED does sometimes lead to HEALING—but not necessarily or always.  
We can be fully CURED without ever being HEALED.  
And we can deeply HEALED without ever being CURED.

2) Tonight we've heard a story in which curing is impossible.

But one wherein healing happens anyway.  
The setting is a banquet—not a cheerful, festive affair, but a tense and sober meal.  
The smell of well-prepared food is suffused by the stench of looming death.  
Ironically, this scene has been catalyzed by the quintessential CURE—  
an act of bringing back life—not from the brink—but from the far side of death.  
Jesus has recently raised a dead-and-buried Lazarus.

By so doing, he has sealed his OWN fate—signed his own death warrant.  
At this banquet, Jesus is a dead man walking.  
Life for Lazarus will soon mean death for Jesus—there is nothing to be done.  
Well, yes, in fact, there is!

3) A bottle is broken, its contents spilled.

The stench of death is temporarily but totally overpowered  
by the rich, sweet aroma of outpoured love.

There is no denial in this encounter—

Mary doesn't anoint the head of Jesus, but his feet.

That's the place where anointing rituals begin  
when lifeless bodies are prepared for burial.

In this anointing, Mary lets her hair down.

That is something a respected woman never does in public.

Never, unless she is in mourning for someone deeply loved, but lost.

In the face of certain death, Mary undertakes a bold, powerful act of healing—  
a gesture that generates wholeness in the very midst of brokenness.

For this dying man, a gift TO Him like the gifts He has given to others—  
signs and symbols of healing that usher in new ways of living.

4) *But this is sentimental, impractical, wasteful, inexcusable!* Judas snorts.

His questionable moral credentials notwithstanding, Judas has a point.

Lots and lots of people could be fed on the cost of this expensive perfume!

But Jesus cuts Judas off. Referencing the Book of Deuteronomy, he says,

*You will always have the poor with you.*

For everyone in the room,

his words would instantly recall the full citation of that text:

*Since there will never cease to be those in need among you,*

*I (YHWH) therefore command you:*

*“Open your hand to the poor and needy in the land.”*

Jesus is NOT saying: *I'm special—I'm dying here—So I'm pulling rank.*

*Anoint ME now—the poor will have to wait!*

NO, Jesus is saying something different—What is THAT? Just THIS:

Hungers of all kinds will always be factors with which to reckon,  
with which we need to deal.

Sooner or later, everyone dies, no matter how hungry or well fed they've been.

The human condition, in other words, cannot ultimately BE “cured.”

Suffering, therefore, in the end, can only be HEALED—

not primarily by contributions of cash

but by connecting touches of caring, vulnerable, compassionate identification.

None of the world's hungers can be healed just by sending a donation.

They can, however, be transposed—in deliberate, hands-on acts of kindness.

Earlier in his ministry, five thousand people were fed by Jesus and his disciples,

not just by tossing out loaves and fish—*HERE! CATCH!*

NO. Five thousand were fed hand to hand—healing released in the feeding.

- 5) So, unless his disciples learn to engage the poor as Mary has just engaged Jesus; unless his disciples are somehow able to TOUCH those among whom they minister— though stomachs may get filled, souls will remain starved.

The starting point in acts of healing

is touching the sick and suffering who are ready to hand, as Mary does with Jesus.

In a situation by every curing measure hopeless,

Mary is a minister of healing—she models how it happens.

- 6) This healing touch is one Jesus passes on to his disciples a few days later.

He washes and wipes their feet at their last meal together.

Having done so, he entreats his followers: *Pass the healing on.*

And so, tonight, we do.

There is nothing magic in the laying on of hands. Nothing narrowly medicinal either.

Rather, something charged with mystery—

something wilder, richer, longer lasting—eternal, even.

Hands offering healing—a whole new way of living.

- 7) *In the midst of life, we are in death*, our graveside burial liturgy intones.

A sobering recognition—an important reminder.

But the touch of Mary—of Jesus—of healing ministers tonight—

the touch of each of us with one another—

all these bear witness to a deeper truth:

*In the midst of life we are in death,*

**BUT *In the midst of DEATH we are HELD in LIFE;***

because the One who freely gives himself up to death

**IS RESURRECTION, and is LIFE**

In the name—and in the power—of Jesus, God's Word Made Flesh,

tonight, with Mary, we offer—and we find—healing.