
I Thank God for Modern Medicine!

**A meditation for Evensong and 5:22 Contemplative Eucharist
by the Rev. Canon David Boyd
The Feast of St. Luke the Physician**

I thank God for modern medicine!

...for breakthrough cancer drugs and advanced medical imaging

...for hip replacements and Tommy John surgeries

...for c-sections and NICUs

...for accurate diagnoses and effective treatments.

I am sure St. Luke the Physician would marvel at the ways medicine has evolved beyond attempting to balance the humors with bloodletting and crude concoctions. I give thanks for germ theory and vaccines! Advances in anatomy, surgery, pharmacology, nutrition, and mental health care mean an increase in both life expectancy and in the quality of that longer life. I give thanks for all who study and are skilled in the art of healing, for doctors and nurses, PA's and pharmacists, physical therapists and home health professionals. Thank you for offering your God-given gifts to a broken and ailing world, and in doing so revealing the very glory of God through your love and care.

All healers thus join St. Luke in pointing us to Jesus, the Great Physician, *Christus Medicus*. Through the witness of Luke the Evangelist, we meet Jesus the healer above all healers. Scripture tells story after story of Jesus healing the sick, freeing the possessed, and even resuscitating the dead. And it's not just scripture. Many of us have stories to tell of God's healing power in our lives.

My favorite healing story comes from a seminary professor of mine: A member of her parish named John was in a bad way. John was a lifelong crank, cantankerous and ornery and mean. And he had cancer. The treatments were not working. He was dying. As the end approached, Mother Julia went to visit him and his wife at their home. She found John laid up in a rented hospital bed in the living room and he was mad, barking orders and complaining constantly. Eventually, John settled down and the three of them sat together. Mother Julia read scripture – Jesus in the garden of Gethsemane. "Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me; nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done." She heard his confession, forgave his sins. Anointed his forehead. They shared communion and prayed. And then she left.

The next day, the phone rang. It was John's wife. "It's a miracle! God healed John!" "That's wonderful news! When can I come see him?" Julia asked. There was a pause. "Well, you see, John died in his sleep this morning. But you should have seen him last night. After you left, he was smiling, laughing. He held my hand and spoke to me tenderly, like when we first fell in love. We told stories about when we were newlyweds, and about our kids. He was just so peaceful. He died truly healed. Thanks be to God!"

Was John healed? Your answer might depend on how expansive your definition of healing is. The dominant definition looks something like "more life": we are healed when life is extended. When we hope for healing, we hope for more moments with loved ones and with friends, more experiences, more memories. This is a good and holy hope. What a blessing it is when the cancer is detected early, when the treatments are effective, when the remission bell is rung. How wonderful it is when Jesus cures a leper, lifts a paralyzed man to his feet, and

raises Jairus' daughter from her deathbed. He gives them a reprieve from pain, from suffering, from death.

But a momentary reprieve is not what Jesus came to bring. Fulfilling the prophecy of Isaiah, Jesus offers not just more life, but a radically different life. Jesus unfurls the scroll and announces that God has heard our cries, that God is moved by our need, and that nothing will keep God's Messiah from setting us free: not an unjust economy, not the jackboot of empire, not a failing body, not even the grave. God's healing Spirit banishes our bitterness, soothes our anger, and cures us of our compulsion to control. Jesus does not just extend life, he transforms it.

I still give thanks for modern medicine, for inventive interventions and increasing longevity. And I rejoice that the deep healing of Jesus isn't something we have to wait for at the end of a successful treatment but that it starts whenever the Spirit gets a hold of us. Today. Fulfilled in our hearing. The Great Physician brings the balm of Gilead to our bodies, our souls, to all of creation. And, being set free from all the bonds that bind us, we can join with St. Luke and all who practice the healing arts to offer that same balm to a hurting world. Thanks be to God!