

"The Undivided Self"

I Samuel 16:1-3; John 9:1-9

Highlands Presbyterian Church, Columbus

June 11, 2017 – Trinity Sunday – Rev. Ronald Botts

Modern life is full of specialty professions, but nowhere is that more evident than in the area of health. There's physiology, psychology, ophthalmology, cardiology, pulmonology, urology, audiology, neurology, and the list goes on. You never become more aware of this than when you're in the hospital. Your physician comes in, checks you out, refers to your chart, then says, "I'd like the doctor to look you over." "But," you protest, "I thought you were the doctor!" "Yes," he replies, "but I'm not **that** kind of doctor."

You're a set of lungs to one practitioner, kidneys to another, heart and blood vessels to a third. One doc wants you to get up and get some exercise, another advises you to lie down and take it easy. If you weren't schizophrenic before you went into the hospital, you probably will be by the time you get out.

Doctors don't even read the same journals anymore unless, of course, it's an investment journal. Everybody has a piece of the pie, but fewer than ever prepare themselves to view the whole. Indeed, the entire practice of medicine and healing has undergone great changes in the last forty years. Other fields have likewise seen their practice change as well.

Even in ministry there is a push to define yourself in ever narrower terms. Some staff ministers in larger churches now hardly ever preach. Others are parish administrators who concentrate on business matters and have little contact with the members as a whole. One fellow is listed as Minister of Music Interpretation and Dance. Sounds interesting!

In ministry some changes in duties can be explained by changes in the practice of faith down through the years. A number of areas have been added, but other things once done routinely, may now have lost meaning in contemporary Christianity. Both of our scriptures for the morning describe such a practice that hardly has any direct application today, or so it might seem.

The custom of anointing probably has little or no meaning for most of us. Ironically, though, we still affirm its worthwhileness in such familiar passages as the 23rd Psalm: "You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows." We may not really understand what we say, yet we have the idea that it is something positive.

In Jewish practice, and in the early Christian Church, anointing was very common. There is the anointing of David in this week's Old Testament reading, and in the Gospel Jesus heals a man's blindness by anointing his eyes with clay. Several words are used in scripture to express the idea of anointing, but the primary one is "masah", from which the word Messiah is derived. The Messiah is, therefore, really the Anointed One.

The purpose of anointing was to symbolize the presence of the Holy Spirit and to give wholeness to a person. The anointing of David as found in our text from I Samuel was a sacred recognition that he was chosen by God to serve as king of Israel. His whole being

would be needed for this most challenging of tasks. David's brothers were each passed over because they were not the total persons required for the job. They each had capabilities, but they were all lacking essentials as well.

In the New Testament we hear of Jesus' healing a blind man. The text says: "As he walked along, he saw a man blind from birth. [And so] he spat upon the ground and made mud and spread the mud on the man's eyes. The man washed in the pool of Siloam and came back able to see. His neighbors then began to ask, "Isn't this the man who used to sit and beg?"

So, in a Biblical sense, "anoint" means to make whole or to acknowledge someone as being whole. Fine oils were often used for anointing, but we see in the story of the beggar that Jesus is able to even take common mud and bring about a positive result. So here we find that these transforming acts take place more through touch, then depending on the substance used.

Paul Tournier, who was a renowned Swiss physician and psychiatrist, tells about his own sense of being anointed and how that literally turned his life around. When he was 38 he was already a successful doctor, but it was then that he experienced a personal healing that made him whole. He had been baptized in the church as a child, but it was only when he decided to give himself completely to Christ that he began to see great changes in his life and work.

His faith, which heretofore had been ritualistic and detached, suddenly became vibrant and meaningful. Patients whom he had looked at as simply "disease entities," now became persons in need of love and attention. An aloof medical manner gave way to warm concern and genuine caring for others.

Before long Tournier recognized that he had to look at people as whole persons in order to fully help them in their sickness. He had to see them as body, mind, and soul. Tournier concluded that to treat one part of a person, while ignoring the others, was both bad medicine and a denial of what Christianity teaches us. The three are inseparable, he said, because these building blocks of the self must be fully integrated for a person to be healthy.

True, we spend much more time here in worship addressing things of the spirit than talking about good physical health, but that doesn't mean other aspects of being are unimportant. It just acknowledges that things of the soul is where our particular emphasis lies. Your doctor may witness to her faith by the way she deals with you, but she's unlikely to have time to preach you a sermon in the examining room. To be a holistic practitioner in any field is to have an overall view of good health, but also to recognize that, to be effective, one needs special training and experience.

If I—as a minister—am aware that you are having physical problems, I'm likely to encourage you to see a physician. If you're going through difficult emotional times, I'll probably suggest that you seek out a counselor. I'd do these things because I'm concerned about you, but also because I know that physical ailments and emotional problems are also often impediments to spiritual growth. What affects one part of us influences the other segments as well. Certainly there may be times when our faith grows strongest while undergoing physical or emotional stress, but then this just illustrates how the three aspects are so intrinsically connected.

In our passage from John today, Jesus heals a man and he is then able to see. Truly, though, Christ gives spiritual sight to all of us. The closer we come to him, the clearer our vision of real life becomes. The more we invite him to lay his hands upon us, the brighter the image of the possibilities for our life.

In Margery Williams classic children's story, *The Velveteen Rabbit*, there is a scene where two toys are talking. "Real isn't how you are made," said the Skin Horse. "It's a thing that happens to you. When a child loves you for a long, long time, not just to play with, but really loves you, then you become Real."

"Does it hurt?" asked the Rabbit.

"Sometimes," said the Skin Horse, for he was always truthful. "When you are real you don't mind being hurt."

"Does it happen all at once, like being wound up," he asked, "or bit by bit?"

It doesn't happen all at once," said the Skin Horse. "You become. It takes a long time. That's why it doesn't often happen to people who break easily, or have sharp edges, or who have to be carefully kept. Generally by the time you are Real, most of your hair has been loved off, and your eyes drop out, and you get loose in the joints and very shabby. But those things don't matter... once you are Real."

Now change the word "real" in their dialogue to "whole" and it fits right in. Being real is being whole.

We are each born with the potential of becoming fully realized individuals. We grow physically without much effort on our part but, as we age, some of us may have better bodily well-being because we work at it. We take this part of life seriously by exercising and by eating and drinking in a balanced manner.

The same thing goes with our emotional health. Life is full of problems, but those who deal best with what comes their way are the ones who acknowledge all their assets and weaknesses. They do what's necessary to strengthen their inner well-being and learn better ways to respond to life's challenges.

What a shame, then, that some individuals are advanced physically and emotionally, but have hardly grown at all spiritually. They are fully mature in body and mind, but are still in the adolescence of the soul. Indeed, many don't even realize what is missing except for an agonizing sense of incompleteness and a lack of satisfaction.

Spiritual growth, you see, has to go along with our other growth or we will be limited in our full development. Through Christ, however, we can become truly real, truly whole. He is the one who can integrate our physical, emotional, and spiritual natures.

Jesus invited those who were searching to come to him and find hope. He held out the promise of awareness and growth. In his touch he anointed them to go forward as realized persons, and he holds that out to us as well. Wherever we are on our journeys of life he offers to go with us and bring us forward to the height of our potential.