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The gift of healing  
Chapel in the Park United Church  
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by Rev. Dr. Paul Shepherd

Based on John 9:1-41

Here's mud in your eye! What a strange expression. As far as I can tell, there are two meanings for the phrase “here's mud in your eye”. The first meaning is an insult.

[image: mud face]

The context is that if you are in a horse race, and you win, the second place rider will have mud in their eye thrown from your horse, which is of course in front. In that context, “here's mud in your eye” means “loser”. The other context for the phrase is as a toast, where you raise your glass in an expression of well-wishing. Some people say, “to your health” when they drink. Others say, “Here’s mud in your eye” which is a direct reference to Jesus healing the blind man by putting mud in his eye.

[image: mud healing]

And if that expression isn't strange enough - what on earth was that gospel story about? In my “Interpreter's Bible” the story is given the heading, “Healing of the Man Born Blind”. So the story is about healing. Simple. But ... I'm not so sure I agree with the editors of the “Interpreter's Bible” on this one. Granted, the key story that underlies our long reading included Jesus healing a blind person. But I don't think the story is about that at all. For one thing, of the 41 verses that we just read, only 2 verses describe Jesus healing the blind man. The other 39 verses are about the misunderstandings and controversies surrounding the healing. I think we need to look deeper. What did the people in the story think was going on?

The disciples speak first, so let's start with them. The disciples see the blind man, realize that he is blind, and jump instantly to question Jesus about guilt and fault. The disciples want to know why the man is blind. They express no concern for the man. They offer him no help, or water, or food. Many ancient cultures - and even modern cultures - affirm a basic relationship between punishment and morality. The whole book of Job in the Old Testament is a struggle around that idea - about what it means when bad things

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happen to good people. In this story, the disciples do not even question whether sin was the cause of the man's blindness. They only question whose sin it was.

The Pharisees - to their credit - believe the man and his story. But they also are not particularly interested in the gift of sight. The Pharisees are only concerned with the process that was used to perform the healing. The Pharisees don't seem to blink at the idea of the man gaining his sight, but they struggle hard with the idea that such a miracle could happen on a sabbath day. The Pharisees don't care about the man - they are completely consumed with the identity of the person who performed the cure.

What about the parents? We might think that the parents would be delighted that their son can finally see their faces, and that they no longer have to support their blind son, who can now - presumably - work for a living. But the parents do not celebrate the new gift of sight for their son at all. The parents are only interested in not getting involved and not getting ejected from the synagogue.

And how about the group that is simply called, "the crowd". I'm not sure if they even knew that the man was cured of blindness. They seem to only understand that a trouble-maker is in their midst, and they want the problem - and the person - rooted out and thrown out. The crowd has no imagination to wonder - to wonder for example if perhaps Jesus could help them too.

But at least the man himself was pleased. "I know one thing. I was blind. Now I see." It's too bad that once the man could see, all he saw was people arguing and bickering about fault, guilt, identity, procedures, wanting to not get involved, and wanting to eject trouble-makers. I often wonder if the man yearned to be blind again - and perhaps deaf as well so he would not have to hear the bickering. The man may even have thought he was better off before.

[image: healing vs curing]

So perhaps we need to start this conversation a bit further back. Starting with some basic questions, like: What is healing? And what is cure? And it's a bit interesting because in our society we often use the terms "healing" and "cure" interchangeably. For me, the terms healing and cure are not only different, but they are practically opposites. And up til now in this reflection I have been using the terms interchangeably. But from

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here on - I will be careful when I use the words “cure”, and “healing”. So what’s the difference?

According to one source, “Healing and cure are related concepts, but they have different meanings. Cure refers to the elimination of a disease or condition, typically through medical treatment or other interventions. A cure may involve the use of medication, surgery, or other medical procedures to remove or treat the underlying cause of an illness.

Healing, on the other hand, is a broader concept that encompasses more than just physical health. It refers to the process of becoming whole or complete, which may involve addressing physical, emotional, and spiritual issues. Healing can occur even if a cure is not possible, and it may involve learning to live with a chronic illness or condition in a way that maximizes well-being. ... Healing is a more holistic approach that involves treating the whole person. Healing may involve addressing underlying emotional or psychological issues that are contributing to physical symptoms or working to improve one's overall quality of life, regardless of whether a cure is possible.

Cure is focused on the physical aspect of a disease or condition, while healing is a more comprehensive approach that addresses the emotional and spiritual aspects of health and well-being.”

Or in really short form: Cure is a destination. Healing is a journey.

[image: throwing away crutches]

So if you were hoping for a cure service today, I’m sorry to disappoint you. If you wanted to see someone hobble up to the front of the church, where I would cure them of something, and they would throw their crutches away. I’m sorry to say your expectations will not be met. I said I am passionate about healing. In general, I’m not that interested in cure. Not professionally anyway.

And that was true of Jesus as well. Jesus healed people. I’m not sure he cured anyone. Take our story today. We call this story the story of the healing of the person born blind. And in the story, Jesus cures someone, right? Well yes, I agree that curing a person’s blindness would quality as a cure, not a healing. But in that long story of 41 verses, only 2 verses were about curing the blind person. The other 39 verses were about

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healing. And just about everyone in the story is offered healing. The story is not really about the formerly blind person at all. The story is about Jesus offering healing to an entire community.

So who found healing? Or at least who were offered healing?

- The disciples find healing. The disciples begin with the assumption that the man was born blind because of sin. But Jesus opens their minds far beyond that. Jesus heals the disciples of their limited vision of what God's grace might look like.
- The pharisees are offered healing. Jesus helps them see that restoring sight to a person is more important than following a bunch of rules.
- The crowd are offered healing. Jesus helps the crowd actually see the person they had been ignoring for decades. Jesus helps the crowd see themselves better.

Perhaps Jesus cured the blind person. Cool. But I am far more interested in how Jesus brought healing to virtually everyone in the story by helping them all see better. If Jesus did cure the blind person, that person is long dead and gone. But helping a community find healing, particularly the healing of learning to see more clearly, is something that continues even today. Perhaps ever right here. Healing is cool.

“Personal healing ... involves taking a proactive approach towards self-care and working through issues that are negatively impacting one's well-being. ... The goal of personal healing is to help individuals gain a greater understanding of themselves, their emotions, and their experiences, as well as to develop the skills and tools necessary to cope with stress, overcome challenges, and lead a happier, more fulfilling life.”<sup>1</sup>

[image: healing vs curing]

That highlights another difference between cure and healing. Cure - as we have been defining it - is external to us. It is something that other people - like doctors - do to us. Cure is something that medications do to us. Cure is about external forces. Healing, however, is internal. It is about personal growth. It is about our own ability to see more clearly and to navigate our own lives better. Yes, other people can help us work on our

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<sup>1</sup> More wisdom from ChatGPT.

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own healing, but ultimately, healing is what we do for ourselves. Healing is internal.

Cure is about what external forces can do to us. Healing is about how we internally change ourselves to live better lives.

I assume after hearing that sales pitch for healing, it must be something we all want, right? Healing sounds fantastic. Don't we all want healing? Don't we all want to live more fulfilling lives? Well as I have matured, I have come to realize that many people do not want healing. They might want the benefits that would come from healing. But they do not want to do any internal work themselves.

Often, people who resist healing simply project their problems onto other people. It seems far easier to blame the government, the church, or "those people" for our woes rather than to realize that we ourselves would be happier if we managed our own attitudes better.

Projecting our own unhappiness never works. Because healing is not an external thing. Healing is internal. Healing means that we are prepared to deal with our own hang-ups and baggage. Projecting our own insecurities onto other people is a complete waste of time. Waiting for other people to change so that we do not have to is a recipe for disappointment.

Perhaps people who resist healing would want healing if it did not involve change. But how could healing not involve change? When we refuse to change, we get the "status quo". Let's be honest. If the status quo was working for us, there would be no need for healing in the first place. There is no possibility of healing without change because healing would be a change.

There is another reason why people resist healing. I need to share a story. I may have shared this before, but I love this story.

[image: Jesus did it]

I'm reminded of an unpopular Jesus story. It's about a person who became a leper. And as a leper, they realized that the only occupation they could engage in was begging. And so, the person became a beggar. But one day, the person met Jesus, and Jesus cured the man's leprosy. Wonderful news, right? Life changing, right? Well, no. Because after the person was cured of leprosy, they continued to beg. Begging, which had originally

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been a response to leprosy, had become tied to the person's identity. Curing the leprosy did not stop the person from begging. The man in fact resented being made well again. The person actually accused Jesus of taking away his livelihood as a beggar by curing his leprosy. The person was cured, but he refused to allow himself to be healed.

Granted, that story is not found in the Bible. It is found in the 1979 Monty Python movie "The Life of Brian". But I believe that the story is found all around us. That story is found in our society, and even in our churches. That story is perhaps found in our own lives.

[image: You are not what happened to you ... you are who you choose to become.]

Sometimes we are wounded in life. And we have great need for healing. But over time, perhaps over years, that wounding becomes part of our own identity - like with the leper. And when our wounds become part of our identity - we may not actually want healing. Sometimes we choose to hold onto our woundings because they are part of how we define who we are. But that is our choice. And we can - at any moment in time - choose differently.

It's Lent. Now is a great time to choose differently.

[image: throwing away crutches]

Earlier, I said I was sorry if I disappointed anyone who came here today hoping to see crutches fly across the sanctuary. And I understand your disappointment. I've been in churches that offered that type of healing service. And those services are certainly exciting. Now I'm a bit disappointed myself.

So you know what - let's do it! Right now! Now is the perfect time to see some crutches fly across this sanctuary. Are you ready? Now, what crutches might we choose to throw away?

[image: unhelpful crutches]

- Denial / Avoidance
- Need for control
- Holding resentment
- Being judgmental

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- Holding anger
  - Feeling powerless

These are all crutches that we sometimes use to get through our days. But the great thing about crutches is that we can throw them away. Or perhaps you are thinking of a different crutch. Reflect on your life and consider if you are using any crutches that you might want to throw away.

Easter is almost here. Resurrection is almost here. Resurrection is not about the resuscitation of the corpse of Jesus. Resurrection is about finding new life. And one amazing way to find new life is to find our own healing. What resurrection - what healing - do you want in 2026? This church can help you find it. Throw away some of your crutches and open yourself to new life and to healing.

[image: heart-whole]

Healing is a gift. It is here. It is now. The only question is whether or not we want it. Do you want to spend the rest of your life trapped behind a wall? Or do you want to live into the freedom that lies just beyond.

Healing is a gift. Embrace it. Live it. Live.

*Amen.*