



It's rather fitting that we offer these services of healing this weekend, so close to the day when we are called to honor the people who were willing to risk everything about their very life in service to us, to their nation. And yet, on Monday, not only do we extend our most heart-felt appreciation, but further raising our awareness of an awful reality for far too many of them: some of whom witnessed the absolute worst that our humanity is capable of in inflicting harm, and then those brave souls are somehow

expected to return home with ease and act as if everything is just fine. Sometimes healing does not happen so quickly. Sometimes healing takes a lifetime. And sometimes we hope for healing to miraculously drop from the heavens. But sometimes that healing emerges in the same humanity that is capable of the absolute worst; then, somehow manages to bring the very glimpse of the most wonderful goodness of Jesus Christ.

There was one man who served in the army for nearly two decades of his life, rising to the ranks of a platoon sergeant, and along the way earned the Bronze Star and a Combat Infantry Badge. Unfortunately, a brain injury led to his return home, and soon began his struggle with Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder. He believed drugs were his best hope to make his pain go away. Then, he wondered if his life was worth living at all. The people who loved him tried to help, to bring some sense of healing to his life, but he just pushed them away in shame. Unfortunately, healing sometimes does not happen so quickly as we would like. Sometimes it takes a lifetime. And amidst our agonizing waiting, we hope that the healing will somehow miraculously drop from the heavens, but sometimes that healing will somehow manage to emerge in the humanity that still has enough love of God within them to not give up so easily.

The veteran's life took a turn for the worst, when he was enduring a night terror that led him to uncontrollably lash out against a loved one in his home. The attack brought him in front a state district judge, who had the power to tear the man's life even further apart, with a possible sentence of nearly ten years behind bars, to hopefully send him a message once for all that he better cave into the help. However, that judge so happened to be one of our fellow ELCA siblings in Christ, who heard his fair share about the God in the flesh in Jesus Christ, who had the power to unleash even more guilt and shame upon humanity, to punish us severely for all the ways we do not live up to divine expectations; but instead that Lord of ours wanted to show just how powerful healing can be, through embracing of tears, and sitting beside those who wondered if their life was worth living, and willing to risk everything about his very life to show humanity just how powerful love can be in the face of all the evil humanity had to muster on a Calvary hillside.

So, that judge, instead of sentencing the veteran to prison, started a program for all those who served, who faced hard times in transitioning back to civilian life. They would still be held accountable to avoiding the harsh effects of substance abuse on them and their loved ones, but they would be connected with counselors, and eventually become mentors to others who wore the uniform. Healing did not happen quickly for that veteran. And even though he became sober and a leader in this program, he is still healing for what he went through in service to his country. But because of this new Veterans Court, he decided to be baptized, and he said that it was the first time that he actually felt the presence of God in his life, fully aware that God would be with him for the entire journey of the healing, as if nothing could ever happen to separate him from

God's love in Jesus Christ. And so says the Psalmist, "Happy are they have the God of Jacob for their help; whose hope is in the Lord their God."

As for that judge, who had the power to make an example, to prove to be tough on crime, instead, had evidently heard enough about a Gospel of hope and compassion and healing. He said, "It's about looking at who a person is and, despite faults, struggles or difficulties, trying to provide them with the resources to succeed. It goes hand-in-hand with everything faith is about." Sometimes, we hope healing to miraculously drop from the heavens. And maybe it does, but it just might make a pit stop in the surrounding humanity that has the power to do the absolute worst, and along the way instill more guilt and shame on those who make some mistakes we don't approve.

And yet, in that same humanity, is still more than enough God to bring the most powerful resource of healing to life: the same Jesus Christ who didn't give up on us on a Calvary hillside, and didn't give up on a judge in a sanctuary, and didn't give up on that veteran, and won't give up on any of us not only for our own personal healing, but to help bring the healing to life for those near and far away. Evidently, there's still more than enough of the Lord of the Resurrection and the Life residing among us today and for an eternal lifetime. And for that Greatest News of all, we most certainly give thanks to God, indeed!