

“Healing”

Psalm 111, Deuteronomy, Mark 1: 21-28

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Edna Spalding was a spunky, determined widow with two young children during the Depression Era. Living in Texas in the 1930s, Edna’s husband the town sheriff had been accidentally shot by a drunken African American youth.

In those days such matters were taken into the hands of the community. A lynching mob immediately executed justice on the young man.

Edna must now somehow make ends meet in order to keep her house and her land. She determines to plant a cotton crop, but has no idea how to plant such a crop. Moze, an African American migrant work happens upon the scene and is subsequently hired by Edna to help her save her farm. She also takes in Mr. Will, a blind man, for additional income toward saving the house. Together the unlikely group plants and harvests a cotton crop—enough to save the house and the land.

The town banker, along with other town merchants possessed by greed, tries to cheat Edna. The town Ku Klux Klan, possessed by racial prejudice and hatred, do their cruel work to drive Moze the migrant worker out of town and off Edna’s property.

The stories of others in this rural Texas town also unfold in the course of the movie—infidelity, back-biting, all manner of brokenness and sickness are revealed.

The final scene of the 1984 movie, *Places in the Heart* catches us off guard. We are taken to the town church, where we’ve been before in the movie. But this time, something is very different. They are celebrating the Lord’s Supper—communion. But

there's something more. The camera pans the congregation and gathered in the congregation are all the different people in the movie. The wife of a wayward husband reaches out and lovingly holds his hand as the elements of communion come their way. Together they partake with the words "The peace of God." The town banker who has shown little compassion for Edna and her children, members of the white lynching mob . . . all sitting together, all receiving the Lord's Supper. Edna and her children, Mr. Will the blind man, Moze the migrant worker, members of the Ku Klux Klan all there together . . . all at the Lord's Table. The final glimpse we get is that of Edna's husband—the white deputy sheriff killed at the beginning of the movie—seated beside the young man who had accidentally killed him. They pass the bread . . . they pass the wine. "The peace of God," they whisper to one another.

Hollywood, for all its failings, got it right in *Places in the Heart*. In it we are given a powerful "foretaste" of the heavenly banquet feast with God. In it, I believe we are shown what John Calvin expressed in the Geneva Liturgy for the Lord's Supper dated way back in 1542.

Here is one of his prayers: ". . . let us be assured that the sins and imperfections which remain in us will not prevent Jesus from receiving us and making us worthy partakers of this table. For we do not come here to testify that we are perfect or righteous in ourselves. On the contrary, by seeking our life in Jesus Christ we confess that we are in death. Know, therefore, that this Sacrament is a medicine for poor sick souls, and that the only worthiness which our Lord requires of us is to know ourselves sufficiently to deplore our sins, and to find all our pleasure, joy, and satisfaction in Him alone."

If a camera crew was here today panning our congregation, including the one who stands in the pulpit, the camera would touch the faces of broken, hurting, sinful people who are in need of Christ's healing grace. The camera would show us as a group of people battling our own inner demons, struggling to overcome the unclean spirits within us. The camera would show us to be a people in need of reconciliation in our families, in our marriages, with our friends. The camera might reveal us sitting beside someone with whom we need to make peace—someone we've harmed, someone who has harmed us. The camera might reveal our secret hatreds and prejudices. It might reveal our wounded hearts, our broken relationships, our unfulfilled dreams. The camera would tell our stories and reveal the Places in **Our** Hearts that need the merciful healing of Jesus Christ.

During Jesus' ministry he was asked: "Why do you eat and drink with tax collectors and sinners?" Jesus replied, "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I have come to call not the righteous but sinners to repentance."

And so the camera does not stop with us. Indeed the focus is not on us really. The focus is this table, where Jesus—the Great Physician—is present to share this meal with us as a foretaste of the great heavenly banquet feast. Jesus meets us at this Table and shares with us "medicine for our sick souls." His presence here at this table, like his presence at the table of sinners and tax collectors of old, says that He fully accepts us and is eager to forgive and heal us. The medicine he offers is His love—it is His very body and blood given for us.

The Table of our Lord is a table of healing and grace. It has been since that first Lord's Supper when Jesus shared the elements with broken, sick sinners—when he shared the elements with one who would betray him (that one possessed by greed and

power), one who would deny him (that one possessed by pride) and 10 others who would fall asleep, flee and give up hope.

Come to the Table that the Great Physician and Healer of our Souls has prepared for us. Let us come fully aware of our need for healing. Let us not fall into the trap today of seeing the blatant sickness of others while ignoring the terminal illness of sin within us—an illness with which we have all been diagnosed. Let us come with the confidence that Jesus has authority to teach and to heal us. Let us come knowing that He will have everything to do with us, even in our brokenness, sickness and sinfulness.

Today, Jesus invites us to share this meal with Him and to receive the medicine that He offers. He asks that we come knowing ourselves to be sick and desiring the medicine, which He alone offers us. Come to the Table, which He's prepared for us. Come to receive the bread of forgiveness, the wine of release. Come to receive healing and to be set free.