



ALL SAINTS CHURCH
PASADENA, CALIFORNIA

Risen With Healing In His Wings

A sermon preached by the Rev. Susan Russell
December 27, 2009

Merry 3rd Day of Christmas – a day we mark this morning not with the 12-Days-of-Christmas-traditional three French hens, but with the All-Saints-Pasadena-traditional three services of healing. Three opportunities for us to gather in the beauty of these still-decked-with-boughs-of-holly-halls to celebrate the miracle of Christmas and the love of the God who loved us enough to become one of us in order to show us how to love one another.

“Light and life to all he brings,” the carol tells us. “Risen with healing in his wings!” it reminds us. Light. Life. Healing. All. Words to sit with for a moment. Words to breathe in -- and then to live out as we look beyond these 12 Days of Christmas to what Howard Thurman called, “The Work of Christmas:”

*When the star in the sky is gone,
When the Kings and Princes are
home,
When the shepherds
are back with their flocks,
The work of Christmas begins:
To find the lost*

*To heal the broken
To feed the hungry
To release the prisoner
To teach the nations
To bring Christ to all
To make music in the heart.*

None of this is news to anyone who’s spent any time at all at All Saints Church --where making God’s love tangible is our job description all year long ... where we aspire to “turn the human race into the human family” 24/7 ... not just for 12 Days of Christmas. But nobody ever said it would be easy. In fact, there are days when this “work of Christmas” we’ve been given to do can seem you’ve-got-to-be-kidding-hard. Preach peace in times of war? Bring healing to health care? Build bridges of understanding across chasms of interfaith challenges? Convince the Archbishop of Canterbury to shine the light of hope rather than fan the flames of homophobia? Advocate for justice in the streets of Gaza while we meet the challenge of those shivering in the streets of Pasadena? And that’s just part of what’s on the “to do” list.

And so we pause today, on this 3rd Day of Christmas, to sit for a moment. To breathe in. To invite the healing power of God’s abundant love to surround us. To fill us. To heal & empower us.

Because as Bishop Barbara Harris famously said, “The power behind us **is** greater than the challenge ahead of us” -- but in order to use that power we have to be ready to receive it. And sometimes that takes some healing help.

And so here is the gift I have for you on this 3rd Day of Christmas – on this Healing Sunday: these words of healing help – of encouragement and inspiration -- from my friend and colleague Tobias Haller: Episcopal priest, brother of Saint Gregory, prophet and poet. He calls it: **“Nothing will be lost.”**

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Beloved sisters and brothers, let me tell you a mystery.
Nothing will be lost. All will be restored.
In the economy of salvation, nothing goes to waste.
Our God is not a God of acceptable losses.
Nothing God has made deserves God’s hatred.
Everything that is was created in love.
Each atom, every blade of grass,
and most of all each human soul,
reposes in the assurance of divine, unalterable love.
Nothing will be lost. All will be restored.

“All? All?” I ask. “What, all?
Even those who turned their backs?
Even those who through free will
rejected you, the Will that gave them freedom?”

“Yes,” says the Lord, “all will be restored.
Nothing will be lost.”
“How, Lord?” I ask.
“How will they be redeemed
who turn away? How will their blind eyes see?
How will their hard hearts melt?”

God answers patiently, “Love will turn them ‘round.
My love turns stars, you know,
it turns the universe; and though a human heart is heavier in my eyes
than a thousand, thousand white dwarf cores,
my love will turn it; wait and see!
All will be restored. Nothing will be lost.”

“When, Lord?” I ask.
“When will the wound be healed?”
“Don’t you know, my Child?” God answers.
“The healing has begun.
It started with the coming of my Son.

This was the new beginning,
just as long before,
when through him all that is was made.

The healing has begun.
Nothing will be lost.
All will be restored.”

“Is it really that simple?” I ask. “Can the wound be healed with a touch?”
“The healing will take a bit longer,” God answers, then pauses.
“O.K., I’ll be honest; it’s you subcontractors, the partners in redemption with my Son.

The specifications are clear,
‘Love God and each other,’
and the plan is concise:
‘one house, many mansions.’

But you seem so intent on constructing outhouses, rock gardens and car parks!
Instead of a banqueting hall you construct fast-food stands!

There are times I regret I extended the work force past Yahweh & Son.

But what’s done is done.
The only thing in all my creation
I don’t mind losing is time.

I’ll have the job done right
if it takes forever,
and we’ll keep at it together until we get it right.

I am not a God of acceptable losses.
I won’t cut corners; cost overruns don’t phase me.
Nothing will be lost. All will be restored.”

And so, my beloved in Christ,
I give you this word:
now is the time for the children to grow up,
now is the time for the heirs to inherit.
Nothing will be lost.
All will be restored.
And now is the time.

The whole world is waiting,
the stars hold their breath,
the wild beasts and cattle regard us with growing impatience,
the birds hover over us, the fish all tread water,

the trees shrug in wonder, or stand limbs akimbo,
and deep in our hearts God's Spirit is groaning:
"Be reborn, beloved, become what you are and the world will be free."

The Spirit is crying:
"Look up to the light, your hearts will be whole
and the wound will be healed."
The Spirit is singing: "My children, my children are home!"

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Become what you are and the world will be free. And that, my brothers and sisters, is my prayer for each and every one of you on this Healing Sunday at All Saints Church. That the healing risen in the wings of the one who loved us enough to become one of us will surround you, fill you, transform and empower you to be all of who **you** were created to be. That every part of your body, soul, mind and spirit will be restored to a place of health wholeness -- and will rest in the assurance of divine, unalterable love. That the prayers for healing offered this morning at this altar rail in this community gathered will send each and every one of us out to be vehicles of God's love, blessing and healing – out into a world yearning to be free – free of violence, hunger, fear and hatred. To do the work of Christmas. To be conduits of that power behind us that **is** greater than the challenge ahead of us.

Because now is the time for the children to grow up, now is the time for the heirs to inherit. Nothing will be lost. All will be restored. And now is the time.

Amen.