

VAIHARAI

(The Dawn)
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**HEALING – ESSENTIAL DIMENSION
OF JESUS' MINISTRY**

When God intervened through his Son Jesus Christ in the history of humankind he did intervene in every dimension of the human life. As we turn the annals of history we observe that right from the dawn of history diseases and calamities have been rudely shaking and threatening the very existence of the human race thus depriving it of the joy of health which people of all ages have considered as a highly prized possession since diseases can bring and have brought heavy social and economic oppression on all, more so on the poor and the innocent. No wonder then that Jesus took this health restoration ministry as an essential dimension of his mission on earth.

Healing – Manifesto of Mission

When Jesus the Messiah descends on the human history he touches the core problem of the sinful humanity – the shackles of diseases, decay and death – and vocalizes the aspirations of the people – liberation from these bondages. Hence at the very outset of his public ministry he sets his agenda clear – that addresses the problems of the people – and highlights the nature and purpose of

his public ministry, **healing ministry**, by proclaiming his manifesto which we may call the 'liberation manifesto'.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me
to bring good news to the poor.
He has sent me to proclaim
release to the captives
and recovery of sight to the blind,
to let the oppressed go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.

(Lk 4:18-19; Is 61:1-2)

Jesus was aware that his proclamation of the good news was intrinsically connected with his mission of healing. His physical healing covered a wide range of suffering. Matthew records twice that he healed 'every disease and every sickness' (Mt 4:23; 9:35) and he specifies 'pains, demoniacs, epileptics and paralytics (Mt 4:24). We can without any exaggeration presume that more of the then recognized ailments - blindness (Mk 8:22-26; Jn 9:35), leprosy (Mk 1:40-45; 17:11-14), deafness and dumbness (Lk 11:14; Mt 12:22), cripple (Lk 3:10-16) and haemorrhage (Lk 8:43-48) – and the then unrecognized conditions must also have been healed (Lk 7:22, footnote 'a'). Teaching, preaching and healing are the three key words that summarize the ministry of Jesus. Mission of proclaiming the good news and mission of healing always went hand in glove (Lk 9:1-6; 10:1-12).

Healing - Supremacy over Sabbath

The Jews adhered to the law of the sabbath very meticulously. It was perhaps the first law of Yahweh to the Hebrews and was very sacred to him (Ex 16:23). It seems to have

been given even before the Decalogue. Nonetheless in the ministry of Jesus, healing takes precedence over such an important law of the sabbath. Several times he carried out his ministry on the sabbath (Lk 6:6-11; 13:10-17; 14:1-6; Jn 5:2-18; 9:14). He did so to correct the Pharisees' misconception and literal interpretation of the laws of sabbath and their observances. By healing the sick on the sabbath he drove home the message to the people that God is better glorified by the manifestation of his compassionate love to the suffering humanity which, wriggling under pain, longs for the wellbeing and the happiness thereof than by a rigid and impersonal observance of the law.

Healing – the ID Card

Healing ministry was Jesus' identity card by which all could recognize him as the Messiah. John the Baptist the forerunner of the Messiah was a firebrand breathing fury and threats against the self-righteous scribes and Pharisees and naturally expected the Messiah of the same mould. But when he heard of a person of gentleness, tender and compassionate love that went out to heal the people afflicted by pain and diseases, he was really surprised to find a different sort of Messiah from what he had expected (Mt 3:10-12). So he sent out his disciples to Jesus on a special duty of verification. The answer of Jesus to the queries raised by John's disciples whether he was "the one who is to come or are we to wait for another" (Lk 7:20) confirmed the significance of the healing ministry of his public mission.

"Go and tell John what you have seen and heard: the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, the poor have the good news brought to them" (Lk 7:22).

His acts of healing are presented as foolproof credentials of his identity as the expected Messiah. Healing therefore was intimately and inseparably connected with Jesus' mission. It is presented simply as the good news in action.

Approach to the Sick

A diseased person is a broken, fragmented person quite unable to cope with the disorder and weakness, much less with the social and economic consequences. The Jews believed disease to be a curse and punishment of God for their disobedience of the laws (Deut 28:15-68; Jn 9:2). So the diseased were considered sinners and were automatically excluded from the community of the 'holy' people of God. The lepers were ostracized (Num 5:2; Lk 17:11-12), the cripples marginalized (Lk 13:10-14), the blind silenced (Mk 10:48; Jn 5:6-7; 9:34) and the paralytics slighted (Jn 5:7). In brief the diseased were living without any recognition as a human person, without a human face. Jesus could not tolerate dumping them as invalids and branding them as disabled and therefore burden to the society. He repudiated such social behaviours and discriminations. He adopted a different approach towards the sick. He touched them (Mk 8:23; 9:27; Mt 8:1-4, 15; Lk 7:14, 38; 8:46), comforted them (Mt 11:28; Lk 7:13; 8:50; Jn 5:6; 11:17-44), infused confidence in them (Mk 5:28, 36; 8:22-26; Lk 8:50), kept a life-giving company with the bereaved families (Lk 7:1-10; Jn 11:17-44) and encouraged them and reinforced his concern for them (Mt 11:28; Lk 8:39; Jn 5:14; 9:35-38) and thus showed great respect to their dignity as human persons. He was aware that his mission, empowered by the spirit of God (Lk 4:18) was to set free these diseased who were victims of religious and social structures that will not allow the sick the benefit of human

beings, who are also children of Abraham and therefore of God (Lk 13:16).

Respect for Human Life

During his public ministry Jesus encountered varieties of sick people with varying degrees of severity. There were cases ranging from an ordinary fever (Mk 1:30), severe chronic disease like eighteen years of cripple (Lk 13:11) and thirty eight years of paralysis (Jn 5:5) to terminal illness (".... a slave ill and close to death" Lk 7:2; "....an only daughter ... who was dying Lk 8:42). There was at least one patient who was completely abandoned by the doctors, i.e., the woman with haemorrhage for twelve years. She was suffering from a serious malady perhaps vaginal bleeding from fibroids which may be called cervical tumor in modern medical terms. The physicians had totally abandoned her and lost all hope (Lk 8:43) and her condition was growing worse day after day (Mk 5:26). Jesus' attitude towards such hopeless and abandoned cases, for example this poor woman who lost all her wealth to the physicians, reveals his absolute respect for human life, whatever the severity of the disease. He exhibits an unqualified respect for human life, even in its last stage. This is something marvelous and greatly exemplary.

And Now...

Taking the cue from the Lord the believer has to grasp how intimately and inseparately interwoven are the kerygma of life and healing ministry to the sick people, as well as sick natures and societies. The healing ministry of Jesus was a spontaneous expression of his sympathy for the sick and a sign of the Kingdom of God.

As then God worked through his Son Jesus Christ, so now he works through the doctors, psychiatrists, counsellors and nurses to continue his healing mission. So every medical professional of any level who deals with the sick of any nature shares in the healing ministry of Jesus and thereby in building up the Kingdom of God. Jesus had no intention to demonstrate any therapeutic technique. But over the millennia medical technology has advanced by leaps and bounds. The sheer extent of the scientific and technical advances of medical knowledge and practice is quite breath-taking. The fight against most of the traditional epidemics is highly efficient. Even more effective medications to combat virus, bacilli, etc, are being discovered. Not less astounding is the progress in surgery, making possible the transplant of the vital organs like heart, kidney, liver. Countless patients in numerous intensive-care units are brought safely through dangerous crises. Hearts that have stopped beating are rendered freely functional again. Ironically these developments come face to face with increasingly inescapable limitations. According to various estimates, this expensive modern medical technology reaches not more than ten to twenty per cent of the population of the developing countries like India. While millions of the people are ailing and crippled because of malnutrition and total lack of basic medical care, enormous personal and material resources are spent on procedures that do not foster life and health at all but only prolong the process of dying. This serves no good purpose and benefits not the needy and worthy and is seemingly only done for the mere satisfaction of technological achievement - and may be also to quieten the collective conscience of a society in favour of abortion and test tube babies. One has only to think of the proportion - or rather disproportion - between the expenditure entailed in prolonging the death process and the amount spent on

caring for the helpless, poor and old people and on arresting the HIV/AIDS pandemic.

In the following articles of this number these issues arising from the latest medical innovations are analysed and discussed from the ethical perspective. While using this sophisticated technology for health, respect for human dignity and affirmation of the sacredness of human life at every stage as exhibited by Jesus the physician should meticulously be adhered to if our healing activities are to be the continuation of Jesus' healing ministry.

**T. Victor
Guest Editor**