

May I speak with the Breath of God, from the Word of God, in the Name of God. Amen.

- “Hope and Healing” Anybody getting tired of that mantra yet?
 - I hope not. We need as much hope as ever and maybe even more healing than ever.
 - But maybe you are getting tired of it, not because it’s monotonous, but maybe because it’s not working out for you.
 - The fact is that we’ve had a lot of illness around here lately.
 - To the point where it’s hard to put ourselves out there as a place of Healing. If that’s really true, then why are so many of us dealing with chronic pain, and one virus after another?
- So I recognize that it can start to sound meaningless at best, and mean-spirited at worst.
- The same can be true when we read about the healing miracles of Jesus.
 - Do we take it to believe that we should be experiencing the same healing ourselves?
 - The hard truth is that we are not actually promised different circumstances in life.
 - We ARE promised God’s presence. And in that, we are promised HOPE.
 - It can feel like a cop-out, or a consolation prize.

- Imagine if someone was promising to pay all your debts, and then they tell you they meant that *spiritually*...
 - It would feel like a slap in the face.
 - And I think we get that a lot from preachers like me.
 - Peace? Sure, but *spiritual* peace. Prosperity? Sure, but *spiritual* prosperity. Healing? You get the idea...
- But today is the Feast of the Baptism of our Lord.
 - Today we renew our baptismal vows, as we reflect on the baptism of Jesus
 - Jesus may be our example for baptism, but his baptism was really nothing like ours
 - Jesus Baptism is a picture of both Hope and Healing
- “Hope” – The Hebrew word Tikvah shares a root with Mikvah
 - Jesus’ Baptism was a Mikvah: a ritual cleansing
 - Elaborate
- “Healing” – The Mikvah was seen not only as a place of ritual purification but physical too.
 - Most often it was a place to be purified after healing, like in the example of the ten lepers healed by Jesus.
 - But it also functioned as a place to achieve healing, as it did for Naaman.
- But all these examples of Hope and Healing in Scripture look like “real” Hope and “real” Healing
 - See that? I called it “real” and you knew what I meant. It meant Hope for a future that’s better than the present, in practical terms. It meant Healing from a physical condition.

- That's what we call "real"
- And if I come along and say, no that's not real. The physical is not "real", the spiritual is "real"
- It feels like a bait-and-switch, doesn't it?
- So which one is it? What is real, the physical or the spiritual?
Let's work on this...
 - Why do we want the things we want?
 - If you want to be free from illness, why? If you want to be free from debt, or conflict, or anxiety, why?
 - I imagine it's in order to feel fulfilled. Satisfied. Happy.
 - There are some people in this room who have received a frightening diagnosis before, like cancer. Maybe even without any symptoms.
 - Think about the day before the diagnosis, and the day after.
 - Your cancer was the same on both of those days. But your mental and emotional state is very different.
 - The only thing that changed is your conscious awareness.
- So am I saying that ignorance is bliss? No.
 - I'm saying that a person can have all the healing in the world, all the prosperity, all the good fortune
 - And still be miserable. We have been taught that there is peace and joy in that but there just isn't.
 - I'm trying to geo-locate fulfillment. Where is it found? In health or wealth? It just isn't there, and we've observed that first hand, if we're willing to admit it.

- In other words, if we are seeking Healing without Hope, then we are on the wrong path altogether.
 - Hope itself IS the Healing.
 - Hope is where we find our fulfillment and meaning.
- There is an entire industry built around seeking Happiness.
 - And there's a reason for it. It makes sense.
 - But Happiness is always contingent. It's always tied to our circumstance, our bill of health, our bank account, our reputation, etc.
 - Which means it floats along the surface. And why do we want that?
 - Why do we want Happiness?
 - I believe we want it because we think it brings Fulfillment.
- I want to put a focus on that word: Fulfillment
 - And I want to leave the focus there, maybe for all of 2025.
 - Because it's that important. And it's that deep.
- Fulfillment gives us a reason to exist.
 - The world has taught us that Happiness is the key to Fulfillment
 - But I think Jesus, in his Baptism, his teachings, his miracles and in his sacrifice...
 - Is showing us something else.
- Amen.