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The Compassionate Healer

The great 18th century philosopher, Immanuel Kant asked three basic questions: Who Am I? What may I believe? and What may I hope for? He felt that these three questions were fundamental questions all people have in common. Reflecting on these questions and the readings for this weekend I was drawn to a film I saw some fifteen years ago called the “Fisher King”. Jeff Bridges and Robin Williams were the lead characters of the film.

Jeff Bridges played a brash, self-indulgent radio shock-jock. Robin Williams played a former college prof. now homeless man bedeviled by the horrible vision of seeing his wife shot by a man in a restaurant who was angry at the world. Bridges in some sense was responsible for the shooting because he was talking to the Assailant that evening on the radio telling him that all yuppies had to be stopped, eliminated. Providentially both men meet and become friends. It is clear that both men suffer from deep wounds; one because his life is empty, the other because of great loss. The road to healing will come when these two men journey together through a sometimes humorous and harrowing adventure to find the Holy Grail—the cup of Christ.

Jesus is often sought by those who are suffering, this is especially the case in the gospel of Mark. We see it in the case of Jairus and the woman. To them it was clear that the power of God’s reign flowed through Jesus. They knew that if he came close healing would happen. And it indeed it does! What is interesting about these stories, aside from the miracle of healing, is that folks seem to be rather nonchalant about the whole thing. I mean, Jesus tells them, get her something to eat. Maybe, we are being told, expect healing from the Lord and then live life. God desires to do this in our lives and we are called to open ourselves to it.

In Jesus we are told that God works to restore and reconcile what was lost to us—real life! How God chooses to do this in a special way in his Son. Jesus healed then and heals now and such healing that we need comes in many packages, some are familiar, others alien, but mostly unexpected. In Jesus Christ, our Lord and brother, we experience the Father’s intimate presence with us to answer those great questions: Who am I? A child of God, born with a sacred dignity and future; What may I believe? In a God who is in love with you and desires your happiness; What may I hope for? I may hope for wholeness, restoration; glory beyond the human imagination that trumps sin, suffering and death.

Jeff Bridges seeks after the grail for his friend. Williams was critically and lying in a coma; injured by some street toughs who preyed on homeless people. Jeff Bridges dresses like his friend and wears a hat that seems to be able to put his mind into his friend’s mind and know something of the pain of his friend. He scales the walls of a house that looks like a castle to seize a golden cup he saw in the newspaper belonging to a wealthy businessman. After he retrieves the cup he brings it to his friend in the hospital. He puts the cup into his friend’s hands, but nothing happens at first. He turns

away for a moment and then he hears, “Is it okay to start missing her now?” Healing comes in ways we cannot predict at times. Both men were healed because they took the journey of compassion together. One could grieve his loss without being lost; the other man could live among human beings again as one of them—with meaning and purpose and concern for the other. God comes into our lives in the embodied compassion of Jesus the Christ who tells us who we are, what we can believe and who we can hope in.