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Redwoods Presbyterian Church  
Larkspur, California  
June 2, 2013  
2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Psalm 96, Luke 7:1-10  
“Good Vibrations”

The immediate connotation of the phrase “good vibrations” is the Beach Boys song of that name. The lyrics of the song however are far from the message of this sermon.

The “good vibrations” of this sermon has to do with the gospel text just read. Healing takes place primarily on the basis of good vibes. Medicine as we know it today – diagnosis, surgery, skilled nurses and doctors – is not in the picture.

And yet, a person is gravely ill at the beginning of the story and he returns to good health at the end of the story simply by good vibes and the goodwill of all those around him. Jesus the healer doesn’t even meet the patient.

Without getting into the cultural dynamics of the day and our modern opposition to slavery we take the story at face value and trust the goodwill communicated therein.

As we just heard, a centurion has a slave whom he highly values. The slave is gravely ill. The centurion hears that Jesus an itinerant healer is nearby and he sends elders of the local synagogue to ask him to come and heal his slave. The elders are more than happy to oblige because the centurion loved the people and even built their synagogue. They tell this to Jesus to persuade him to go centurion’s home.

Jesus is on his way when the centurion sends friends to have Jesus simply say the word and his slave will be healed for he knew that when he told soldiers to go they went. They obeyed his word so Jesus could say “be healed” and the ill man would be healed. Jesus is bowled over by the man’s faith and says so. The friends return and find the slave in good health.

My sense is that the centurion keeps the slave informed every step of the way and in the process the slave gets well. Good vibes, good will, care and concern does it.

Rachel Naomi Remen. M.D. who works with cancer patients writes in an article called “The Search for Healing” that most important for truly fostering the healing process is the way we stand in relationship to each other and that I think is the “good vibrations” of this gospel story.

One thinks of master/slave relationships as being adversarial but in this story the master highly values his slave and instead of leaving him in the ditch he lays him in a bed and calls a nearby healer to heal him. Local religious elders and friends are happy to call upon Jesus. Rich relationships are palpable.

The vibes and relationships are so good that that healing begins before Jesus comes onto the scene and when Jesus does enter the picture he affirms the centurion's amazing faith. Faith is other ingredient for healing.

Dr. Remen states: "I don't believe that one person heals another. I believe that what we do is invite the other person into a healing relationship. We heal together. Even defining a person as a healer seems to assume some sort of fixing or repairing. A better definition would be inviting someone to participate in life (we could say faith) with us, to participate in that movement toward wholeness that underlies all life."

I'd got to this point of this sermon during the week and thought I'd said all there was about the text until Kristi van Nostran came into my life as she did for 13 of us on Wednesday evening. Kristi brought alive for us her co-mission work with the Presbyterian Joining Hands against Hunger Network in El Salvador.

The following morning Kristi and I were chatting over breakfast and I narrated the gospel text for today and asked if it resonated with her work in El Salvador. She responded immediately and animatedly that it describes her work.

Gone is the old-time missionary who brought great knowledge and wisdom from the West to the unknowing masses in the world. Kristi's work was to draw alongside the people she worked with, mostly the poor and suffering, and together they built ministries of health and healing. Wisdom is mutually shared.

One group of poor El Salvadorans visited her and wanted to build a chicken farm and sought funding for egg incubators. Kristi's ministry is not about hand-outs but she did drive this group out to a group of women who had great success over three years with this very enterprise and all of them worked with and empowered each other to start the new enterprise. The women had made their own incubators with boxes and lamps.

One sees elements of the gospel text in this brief story. Kristi affirms faith. Good vibes are expressed by all as they build relationships and learning. Healing and growth take place as the people provide for each other in new ways.

Kristi sees Jesus as an agent of empowerment in the gospel story. "And he empowers by affirming faith," I said. Somehow, this brought water to Kristi's eyes. Her ministry in this brief conversation was validated. I'm sure it's validated

in many ways. She just speaks and one sees the spirit of God wonderfully at work in El Salvador.

It might be strange to call this sermon “Good Vibrations.” It’s too light a phrase but it speaks volumes. Good vibrations heal a myriad of ills. It has for me in many ways but those are other stories. Holy Communion which we celebrate today expresses good vibrations. This is a “good vibrations” church and that’s great for us all. Amen.