

A Search for a Theology of Healing

"From earliest times, the therapeutic power of touch has been recognized and has been raised to a sacramental significance in both the religious sphere and beyond it. Medicine men, shamans, healers from every culture and part of the globe have used--and continue to use--sacred touch as the medium of blessing (and) restoring health." Tom Harpur¹

"Theologically, healing is what God is all about. The Bible states it boldly this way: 'I am the Lord who healeth thee.'" Tom Harpur²

Healing is a broad, sweeping term. Like the English word "love," it is used to describe everything from the mundane to the profound to the deeply spiritual to sweaty, fleshy human connection. We think of healing in connection to illness and doctors, broken bones and scraped knees. We also use healing to describe emotional issues such as healing from grief or interpersonal issues such as healing a relationship. Healing can also be spiritual, addressing our deepest pains or questions.

There is strong Biblical support for healing as ministry. Many of the books that I looked to for research have strong sections on this.³ I have not repeated that work here. This paper is a very personal exploration. I became interested in healing before I was called onto the ministry path, before I was even part of a faith community. A part of my ministry journey has been to understand healing as a component of my call and, therefore, to consider how to understand it theologically. In particular I will be exploring this in relation to energy-touch healing.

When I first began researching for this paper I read several books, looked at many websites, searched out articles...and could have kept on going. Each piece I read directed to me to others. I find the whole milieu of energy healing fascinating. In reading there were threads that connected to quantum theology, scientific studies, faith healers who are respected and those considered charlatans. There were discussions about shamans, healing versus curing and the whole milieu that comes from Eastern holistic medicines that focus on chakras and meridians. There was also a connection to the new age notion of manifestation and the field of personal inspiration. Totally intriguing and not a little bit mind numbing. I found myself a bit confused about what it was I really needed from this exploration. I also recognized that this is a continuation of some other explorations I've engaged throughout my spiritual journey over the past six years.

What ended up becoming particularly important were two personal stories. One is my own, the other is that of a friend, a healing practitioner who has had profound healing experiences. These stories make up a significant part of this paper. It is through these stories that I begin to discover a theology of healing.

Stepping on the Pathway

"Master," said John, "we saw a man driving out demons in our name and we tried to stop him, because he is not one of us." "Do not stop him," Jesus said, "for whoever is not against you is for you." Luke 9:49-50

1 Tom Harpur. *The Uncommon Touch*. (Toronto:McClelland & Stewart Inc, 1994.) 40.

2 Ibid. 12.

3 Examples include: *Healing from the Heart* by Rochelle Graham et al.; *The Uncommon Touch: an investigation of spiritual healing* by Tom Harpur; *Growing a Healing Ministry* by Kathy Edmison; and *Healing in the Name of God* by Ted Schwarz.

Healing Pathway is one of "a variety of healing methods where the hands are used to transfer energy."⁴ Kathy Edmison notes that "as there are no explicit Christian paradigms or models to guide and support the establishment of such energy-touch healing ministries in contemporary settings, those interested in exploring energy-touch healing have turned to modalities such as Reiki, Therapeutic Touch, and Healing Touch for training."⁵

The underlying principle of energy-touch healing methods is that there exists a universal life force energy. This life force exists in all living creatures (and, indeed, in many things that we would think of as being inanimate such as plants and minerals.) Hands are used to encourage healing, wellness, or wholeness through movement of energy, removing energy blockages and balancing the energy system.⁶ While most often this is associated with humans, the positive effects of energy work have also been demonstrated on animals and plants.⁷

Healing Pathway is a particular method that adds a Christian context to energy-touch healing. It's essentially Healing Touch with a Christian twist. Training in the Healing Pathway is offered through Naramata Centre, a United Church training centre located in British Columbia.

I belong to a Healing Pathway group at Northwood United in Surrey. We hold a healing service once a month. After the service and on one other evening each month, we offer appointments for people to receive personal energy healing treatments. On alternative weeks we meet as a practice group to try different techniques and give treatments to each other.

Healing Pathway is a spiritual practice. We begin by gathering with a time of check-in. Lighting candles invites or acknowledge the presence of the divine among us as we ground ourselves using prayer and guided meditation.

As we begin each healing, we take the hand of the participant and state our intention as a healer. While the words used may have some variation, a fairly typical statement would say something like:

"[Name of person], it is my intention to be a conduit of God's love and healing energy, for your highest good."

There are two points to note: 1) is that the healing is considered to come from God. The healer is a conduit or vessel for the energy that ultimately comes from God. 2) the intention is for healing, but how that healing manifests is up to God, not the healer. The "highest good," sometimes stated as "for whatever you need in body, mind and spirit," is not specified by the healer. There are times when the person will name a specific concern or ailment which the healer will include in their prayer, yet how healing manifests is ultimately left to God. While there are various specific techniques associated with Healing Pathway, it is often considered that the intention of the healer is more important than getting the technique exactly right.

In my experience, intention, while very important, is not the only ingredient. Some practitioners have a greater ability to both sense and move energy, some receive intuitive messages about particular areas that need work or about issues that have impacted their body energy. Some practitioners can direct their energy very specifically. Like most things, the more you practice, the "better," or in this case, the more sensitive you get.

Last summer I was working at Naramata Centre during the time that several forest fires burned in various parts of the Okanagan Valley. Although the fires were up the valley from us, the way the wind blew and the mountains enclosed the valley, smoke settled over the lake and

4 Kathy Edmison. *Growing a Healing Ministry*. (Kelowna: Woodlake Books, 2004.) 8.

5 Ibid. 10. Edmison

6 Ibid. 8. Edmison

7 Tom Harpur uses numerous examples in *The Uncommon Touch: an Investigation of Spiritual Healing*. See also my interview with Kim Brandt in this paper.

village for several weeks. I developed a cough that sat low in my chest for many weeks and would not clear.

I booked an appointment with the Healing House where Healing Pathway practitioners offer treatments throughout the summer. Practitioners typically work in pairs and tend to pair one very experienced practitioner with a less experienced practitioner, although in order to work there all must have completed all four phases of the Healing Pathway training program.

This particular appointment, one of the practitioners was a very highly regarded healer who had been practising hand-energy healing for over 20 years. She focussed her energy on the area of my deep cough, one hand under my back, the other on my diaphragm. As she worked I could feel my chest loosen, the blockage moving up and up and up until I could cough it clear. As she worked I could feel a variety of sensations and as they happened she would echo exactly what I was feeling. For example at one point I could feel a column of fire in my chest and she said to me, "I can feel something like a column of fire coming through my hands." At the end of the appointment, that deep cough in my chest was gone.

At the same time I had just experienced a menstrual cycle that was extremely heavy and lasted over 20 days. Prior to this I had been having increasingly crazy heavy cycles which I had put down to para-menopause. After clearing my chest she moved her hand down to my lower abdomen. The best way to describe it is that it felt as if my body was drinking in her energy, a sensation she also noted. She commented that my body was telling her that my hormones were out of balance. After this appointment my menstrual cycle returned to normal.

She came up behind him and touched the fringe of his clothes, and immediately her hemorrhage stopped. Jesus said, "Someone touched me; for I noticed that power had gone out from me." Luke 8:44, 46

I had had many Healing Pathway treatments before this and came away from most feeling renewed, grounded and energized. This one included a much more specific, and powerful, physical healing.

One More Step Along the Way

"Jesus gave his disciples "power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases, and he sent them out to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal" Luke 9:1-2

My personal journey in healing ministry is longer than my identified journey toward ordered ministry. I first studied Qigong with Dr. Effie Chow from the East West Academy of Healing Arts. Qigong is a broad term that covers holistic modalities in Total Chinese Medicine, such as movement (similar to tai chi), pressure points based on acupuncture points and overall health. I have a certificate from a Qigong basic skills seminar dated December 1994.⁸ I began my theological training in June 2004. I took my first Healing Pathway level in the summer of 2009.

My interest in holistic healing was not consistent throughout those times. In fact I had essentially forgotten about some of my earlier interest until I tripped over it again during the pastoral care year training at the Centre for Christian Studies. As I wrestled with some of my experiences in ministry, one of the instructors drew my attention back to some of our readings on the healing power of ministry, most particularly one by John Dominic Crossan.⁹

I wrote a paper about it that winter and re-discovered, in my filing cabinet, material such as a 1993 edition of "Parabola" magazine focussed on healing. Interestingly, at the time I wrote,

⁸ Qigong is a stream of traditional Chinese medicine that works both with body energy and meridians.

⁹ John Dominic Crossan. "Prologue; the meaning of healing." *The Birth of Christianity: Discovering What Happened in the Years Immediately After the Execution of Jesus.* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1998.)

"While our example with Jesus... also includes the healing of biological disease, and while I have heard stories of people being cured of diseases through energy healing, visits to sacred shrines such as at Lourdes in France or other seeming miracles, I have neither personally experienced nor witnessed that and do not see that as part of my own ministry, as intriguing as it is for me."¹⁰

As I read this now I realize two things. One is that I had clearly forgotten my own first experience with the Healing Pathway in 2004. I was participating in the Leadership Development Module (LDM) at the Centre for Christian Studies in Winnipeg. I recall feeling very scattered this particular day, generally ungrounded and like my limbs wanted to fly away. One of my classmates had trained in the Healing Pathway. Through Qigong I was familiar with energy work and had, in fact, demonstrated something I'd learned in Qigong at one of the LDM workshops we had planned as participants. I asked her if she would do Healing Pathway on me and she agreed.

In many of the Healing Pathway techniques, the practitioners hands don't actually touch the person they are healing. As she passed her hands in a long stroke over my body from my head toward my feet, my body literally leaped off the bed I was laying on when she crossed the area of my heart chakra, like a body does when one of those heart shock machines is used. It took several smoothing passes and some specific work in that area before my body stopped reacting in that way. I came away with a sense of calm and groundedness that lasted the rest of our program. My own energy had been very much impacted by her work. And I had experienced healing.

The second point is that I realize now that I had named a block when I wrote that paper. The paper discussed how Jesus healed on a number of levels, social, biological and experiential. I discussed at length the social and experiential aspects of healing and how that might pertain to my ministry, particularly as aspects of social justice. But the biological healing was my stumbling block. While I could believe that Jesus had the power to heal in that profound way, I was pretty sure that I did not.

It is true that with energy-touch healing we wouldn't hold a particular expectation for biological healing. Healing, as my paper noted, happens on many levels. Helping someone heal psychologically or emotionally can be as important as healing bodily ailments. However putting up a barrier to one kind of healing can impact them all.

I also wasn't acknowledging that it wasn't only Jesus who healed. He commissioned the disciples to go out and heal.¹¹ Later in the time after the resurrection the disciples were also known for their healing.¹² A theology of healing needs to recognize that Jesus commissions us to heal.

How is it that we are able to heal? Many energy-healing practitioners describe their ability to heal as an ability to tap into the energy of the universal life force. A few years ago I wrote a paper on God as interconnectedness in which I described my understanding of God as the "life force of the universe."¹³ I noted that "I do not understand God as an entity, but as the spirit of life. Our spirits are part of God, intermingled, and the energy that we put out into the world becomes part of that. That is why prayer is so powerful."¹⁴

What I was saying then and still believe, is that the energy of the universal life force, which some people call God, is not a one way energy. We do not just draw energy from God, but also give energy to God. We are, in fact, all part of God.

The energy we give out also impacts everything around us. That's why one person's good

10 Kimiko Karpoff. "Ministry's Healing Power." 2006.

11 Luke 9:1-2; Mark 6:7; Matthew 10:1

12 Acts 3:1-10; Acts 5:12-16

13 Kimiko Karpoff. "God is Interconnectedness." 2006. p3.

14 Ibid.

humour is infectious, or another person's grumpiness, or why some people give us the creeps. Their energy is out there touching ours. Earlier I mentioned a Qigong exercise that I demonstrated at the Leadership Development Module. This is a description I wrote of that exercise in my paper on God as Interconnectedness.

"The affirmative energy exercise, which I demonstrated at the LDM, illustrated how our spiritual energy works. During the demonstration, one person was asked to come forward and their arm strength was tested both when others in the group were affirming them and being negative toward them. When affirmations were given, the person was strong. When negative thoughts were given, the person was weak...God is the life force of the universe, but our own energy connects with God's and either supports God's positive energy, or depletes it."¹⁵

Again there are a couple of issues that emerge for me now as I read this. This energy exercise demonstrates our ability to tap into the universal life force. It also demonstrates that the intention of the healer is important. Therefore when I harbour disbelief about my own ability, that affects the outcome.

A Healer's Story

"I don't think anybody heals anybody. I think people heal themselves. And there are facilitators for that. I think we're all born whole, and that's the natural state. That's just my opinion."

Kim Brandt

Kim Brandt is a healing practitioner in Fort Langley, BC, who also has had profound personal experiences of healing.¹⁶ He began his healing work as a massage therapist. For about four years he has done energy healing almost exclusively. I spoke to him by Skype on March 18, 2010. Our conversation touched on many issues therefore I record his story pretty fully.

I began by asking him what led to the shift from massage to energy healing.

"In 1997, I took this introductory healing touch course¹⁷. It was a weekend course. On Monday morning at work, one of my regular clients showed up. She was very elderly and very frail. Just looking at her body language I could tell she was in a lot of pain. She looked at me and said, 'Kim, it hurts so much, you can't touch me.'

"I had just taken this course so decided to use it. I was faking it, though. I had a sense of the energy but I couldn't really feel it.

"I hadn't been paying much attention to her, I was focussed on doing it correctly. When I looked at her I could see her whole demeanour had changed. She looked at me and said 'Oh, Kim, it doesn't hurt anymore.' This was a course I had just taken and I didn't really know what I was doing, but her pain was gone. She had cancer, her body was riddled with cancer.

"I reflected on that. On healing. I obviously didn't heal her cancer. But in that moment she was healed from her pain. I wondered about that.

"It worked because I loved her, I felt compassion toward her. I did what I could to help her feel better. Essentially I think I just normalized her energy, for lack of a better word.

"Then, I didn't do that for a long time. Sometimes [clients] were [weirded out]. They wondered what I was doing. Four years ago I just said this is what I do now."

15 Ibid.

16 I spoke to Kim Brandt through Skype, March 18, 2010.

17 Healing Pathway Level I at Naramata Centre

What was the turning point?

"I felt compelled to do it this way. To work with people in this milieu. It felt more effective to me. There was a much deeper spiritual connection with people. I pray for people when I work with them. I bless them all when I work with them. To work with them in this milieu is very spiritual. I visualize Jesus a lot when I'm doing this."

Kim told me about two personal healing experiences. "I've had a couple of profound healings that I can only attribute to some mysterious experience," he said. "One was my compulsion to drink. I'm a recovered alcoholic. The compulsion was lifted from me as a direct response to a prayer request. That happened 1988."

The second happened in 2004 after Kim fell off a roof. It was just before Christmas. A cat-scan determined that he had crushed his ninth thoracic vertebrae. The doctors suggested that he get a body brace and sent him home with some Percocet, a strong painkilling narcotic drug.

Kim explained about the first thing he did after the fall, before going to the hospital.

"I foolishly went back to my house. The very first call that I made was to the minister at the Unity Church that I was attending. The second call I made was to the prayer chain at that church. Immediately people began to pray for me."

Kim spent a week in bed in extreme pain.

"Debra, my wife, bless her heart, she would come in and read me positive affirmations. I had a stack of stuff by the bed. When I came out of the Percocet-induced stupor, I would read positive affirmations.

"It was really painful, even with heavy-duty narcotics. I was in bed for a week. I didn't even know what day it was I was so out of it.

"One day I was lying in bed and I could feel something going on where this injury was. It was a tingling sensation. I later found out that it was Sunday morning and the whole congregation of the Unity Church was praying for me at that minute.

"The next day...I got up and went to Walmart and got a corset. I went back to work. I had appointments booked for January 3. I stayed on the pain pills, but I didn't miss any work. My MD was shocked by how quickly I went back to work. But I wasn't. I expected to be well."

I wondered how people in the Unity Church prayed for Kim. If it was different than what I was familiar with in the United or Anglican traditions. In the United Church I attend, and most that I've been to, there is a time for "prayers of the people." At Shiloh-Sixth Avenue United this is a time where people in the congregation are invited to state out loud a person or situation that they would like prayed for. For example, "for Kim who broke his back." After the situation is stated and, depending on the nature of the situation, the congregation responds with either "Compassionate one, hear our prayer," or "In praise and thanksgiving, hear our prayer." The prayer simply asks God to hear. It seems different than what Kim described.

"In the Unity tradition, people would not pray for me to be healed from a broken back. They would hold me to the light and see me whole or healed. The tradition is that they pray and visualize the person well, whole and complete. There's no focus on what's wrong. All the focus is on seeing that person in their divine state, which is whole, well and complete. It's a significant distinction.

"At the Unity Church, there's no agenda [in their prayer.] 'I'm just putting this out there. I'm going to see you whole and that's my prayer for you.' It's 'Thy will, not mine be done.'

"Unity is a prayer based ministry, that's how they originated. Its foundational to their ministry. That's where I learned how to pray in the way that I pray today."

Kim believes that people need to be open to healing for it to work.

"If you still harbour a lot of negative belief about yourself, that kind of thinking, that's going to interfere with the process.

"I'm trying to think of how Jesus addressed this. He would say 'do you want to be healed?' He would ask people. I used to wonder about that. Why? Who wouldn't [want to be healed]? But people get caught up in their misery and sometimes they don't even know it. If they've been conditioned since they were children, 'You'll never amount to anything, you'll always be poor, you're worthless...,' that's going to stand as a barrier. Or sometimes they get something out of their illness, some benefit.

"I see it in AA all the time. That's where I see most of this stuff. I see healing all the time. Every time an alcoholic comes in to AA and becomes sober and stays sober, that's salvation, that's the power of God. But the person needs to be willing, they need to be honest with themselves, they need to be open to receive it. The bottom line is I need to surrender because the ego just doesn't want to let go."

In *The Healing Pathway*, practitioners understand that the healing does not come from them, but from God and that they are conduits or vessels of the healing energy that comes from God. I asked Kim about this.

"I don't believe in the conduit thing because I don't believe in an outside source. I don't think God is out there to use me as a channel. I think we're all gods in that way. Gods with a small 'g'."

"I was not as good when I first started this. I was really intentional at getting better. I went out and worked on horses to learn to be more intuitive. I thought, 'Well, if I'm going to start to practice this, I should work on horses because they won't be able to talk to me. I would have to do this intuitively.

"Two weeks later someone from one of the stables out in Langley called to ask me if I would do CranioSacral therapy on their thoroughbreds -- racehorses and breeding stock. They just called me out of the blue, wondered if I did this stuff. And so I went out. Actually what I did is I went to the library and got a book on horse anatomy and studied it up and went out and worked on these horses. They were happy enough to pay me and have me back because it was effective. Thoroughbreds, they don't use artificial insemination. The females get really banged up. These horses are worth a lot of money, you're talking tens of thousands of dollars. I just went out there and did it. I developed some of my intuitive skills well enough to be able to practice on people.

"And to me, Kimiko, that's how the universe works. I needed some horses to practice on, the universe supplied some for me. And when I didn't need them anymore I was able to do it on people."

You're not a conduit, but you pray. So what are you doing there?

"I'm engaged with the mystery."

How would you articulate a theology of healing?

"Each of us is divine. And when we set our intention with a clear focus, mysterious things happen. People are healed. Amazing solos get played on instruments. People invent things that were never created before. The crime rate drops 20% in Washington DC when 3000 people come to meditate on peace.¹⁸ I think we're capable of so much more than many people think they are capable of.

Kim's story speaks to me on many points. Listening to him talk, I know that he absolutely believes in what he does as a healer. And he also holds no ego attachment to the outcome. While he said that he does not believe that he's a conduit for God's energy, as some practitioners believe, he still leaves the outcome to God. "Thy will be done."

Kim noted nobody "heals anybody, people heal themselves" and there are those who can facilitate healing. This is the conclusion Tom Harpur had as well. He said that "All healing is ultimately self-healing."¹⁹ He explained that "our healing system is already in place. What happens in the laying-on of hands or other treatment by a genuine healer is that this system is stimulated."²⁰ The intention to heal with love and compassion and a spiritual connection facilitates the healing.

It's interesting to me that Kim says that he is not a conduit of God's healing, however he talks about having a deep spiritual connection with those he works with. To me, that deep spiritual connection is also our connection to God. Tom Harpur noted that "[Jesus'] claim in healing the sick is to be an agent or channel for the Divine Energy flowing from the heart of the universe, the very breath or presence of the dynamic Spirit of God."²¹ Rochelle Graham describes it as being an instrument of God's grace.²² It all sounds like different ways of describing the same thing.

I also appreciated Kim's description of the prayer of the Unity Church. In praying for him, the church members did not pray for his broken back but visualized him well, whole and complete, which is, in his description, the natural state. Again, this removes the healer from the need to identify a specific treatment and indeed, makes room for healing in a way that the healer may be unaware of. It opens space for the mystery to work more effectively.

This is very helpful to me. I actually feel more free to offer my healing ability when I'm not tied to the outcome. If I can heal with the intention of seeing the person well, whole and complete, then I don't need absolute clarity about whether the energy prickle I feel over someones' abdomen is caused by a stuck relationship with a parent or physical disease or, indeed, both. It allows the person's body and spirit to do what it needs to do, not what I think it needs. I also noted his comment that if a person does not want to heal, they can block it. I am also not responsible for that outcome. Healing is relationship and with any relationship, if one party doesn't participate, nothing happens.

Kim's story also supports the notion of, as disciples, being called to healing and nurturing

18 This, he explained, was described in a scene from the documentary movie "What the Bleep."

19 Tom Harpur. 11.

20 Ibid. 113-114.

21 Ibid. 60-61.

22 Rochelle Graham, et al. *Healing from the Heart*. (Kelowna: Woodlake Books, 1998.) 87.

that skill. There have been people who believed that nobody could be taught to heal; you were either born with the ability or not.²³ Others disagreed, notably Dolores Krieger and Dora Kuntz who developed the energy-touch healing technique known as Therapeutic Touch which is now used in many hospitals.²⁴ There is now a broader agreement that everyone has some latent ability to heal and can be taught, while acknowledging that some people have more aptitude than others.

My story

The one who believes in me will also do the works that I do and, in fact, will do greater works than these. John 14:12

Besides being drawn to energy healing modalities, it has been named in me from outside in a manner oddly similar to being called into ministry through both internal and external voices. An experience in the summer of 2008 was very profound for me and, I acknowledge, is a story I might not tell just anyone because it sounds in-credible to our western logic. Which, I realize, makes little sense coming from a person who carries enough belief in an indefinable higher power that I am studying to be a minister.

I was working for the summer at Naramata Centre. I had been leading vespers that evening. A man who appeared to be in his early 30s had been in the chapel meditating when I arrived to set up. He stayed for the service and remained as I was cleaning up.

Typically I don't clean up while people are still sitting in the worship space. However, most don't linger too long so it's not a concern. This evening I was aware that it was getting later and I worked the following day so I began quietly tidying a few things while trying not to be disruptive of spiritual atmosphere. As I was working the man introduced himself as a friend of one of the week's workshop leaders and we chatted a bit as I tidied.

He had continued to sit cross-legged on a chair at one end of the chapel and I was moving around on the other side. To set the scene a bit, the chapel at Naramata Centre is an intimate stone and wood space with a small circular gathering area at one end. We had just finished vespers and the lights were dim. There were candles lit on a small table in the centre of the circle. It is a place that people mark as being very spiritual. The atmosphere was gentle and peaceful. Although I did not know this person, I felt no concern. This is a sketch of our conversation as I recalled it later.

DC: Can I ask you something?

KK: Sure.

DC: Are you a healer?

KK: [Pause.] Not really. My grandfather who was a Samurai healed. He did something called Seiki.

DC: I see in you a strong healing energy. Can I ask you a few questions?

KK: Sure. Should I sit down for this? :-)

23 Tom Harpur notes this belief in healer Oskar Estebany, a respected healer whose ability was the basis for many scientific experiments on the validity of energy healing. *The Common Touch* .139.

24 Harpur. 108.

The crux of the beginning of this conversation was that he asked me if I knew I had the power to heal and I responded "yes."²⁵

DC: Sit. Open your chakras, feel the energy. Where does it come from?

KK: The air.

DC: Right. Where does it gather?

KK: Here (indicating area of chest right at the diaphragm/heart area.)

DC: Where does it flow to?

KK: My hands.

DC: Right. And where does it go from there?

KK: Nowhere.

DC: That's right. It goes nowhere because you haven't activated it. We're going to do that right now.

KK: Okay.

DC: Your energy is here (indicating area by diaphragm/heart.) What symbol would you give this energy?

KK: I don't know.

DC: Your mind is in the way. Release it by saying, 'Mind I release you.' Say, 'Mind I release you.'

KK: Mind, I release you.

DC: Now, what is the symbol of your energy/power?

KK: A flower (moving hands to position like a flower at the chest. I continue to hold them there.)

DC: Good. What does the flower look like?

KK: It has many petals. It's burgundy at the base becoming pinkish white at the tips. The petals are not small, but not big. The size of one or two thumbs and thick fleshed, not too delicate. It's shaped like a chalice and smells like honey.

25 It's interesting to note that I had been experiencing what had seemed to me to be an awakening of energetic sensitivity over the preceding year or so. I had also come to understand that the ministry I offered was, on a spiritual, societal and experiential level, healing for many people. Yet I had never called myself a healer.

- DC: A chalice! Perfect. Like the chalice of wine at the communion.
What is its purpose?
- KK: Don't know. [tentative] To love?
- DC: More than that. What is the purpose of the lovely many-petalled
burgundy flower that's shaped like a chalice?
- KK: I don't know. My brain is in the way. :-)
- DC: Let me talk to the flower. Can I talk to the flower?
- KK: Okay.
- DC: Hello many-petalled flower with burgundy petals that is shaped like
a chalice.
- KK: [no response]
- DC: Answer as the flower. Hello many-petalled flower with burgundy
petals that is shaped like a chalice.
- KK: Hello.
- DC: How are you?
- KK: Fine.
- DC: Many-petalled flower with burgundy petals shaped like a chalice,
can you tell me what is your purpose?
- KK: To quench.
- DC: [laughs in delight] Of course! Perfect, to quench. A chalice of
quenching.

In this conversation DC called out my healing energy and asked me what I had been waiting for. A remarkably similar question I received about being called to ministry while at the Leadership Development Module. I said that I had felt that I had a power and that others had noted it before. And that I was waiting for a teacher.

I will take a moment to acknowledge that this part of the interchange makes me a bit uncomfortable. I feel weird saying that I have some kind of power. It sounds like a conceit. And while I actually *feel* it to be true, I *think* that it couldn't possibly be and saying it feels like putting on airs.

To continue, DC called my energy out again and noted that I have great power. He asked me what am I afraid of. I recall kind of laughing and making a flip comment that Jesus and his followers weren't exactly well-received and that people are already scared of me. His response

was that people don't know what to make of me because my energy is weird. But that's because I hold it down. Let it flow, he encouraged.

A few days later I was again leading vespers, the last for that week. DC hadn't attended because he had been unwell that day, but came in after while several of us were still there visiting. He asked me if I'd share some of my healing with him. Remember, I did not at this time think of myself as a healer.

After some hesitation I moved to where he had lain down on some cushions and began feeling the energy in his head. Whatever I did was entirely intuitive as I had had no formal training in energy-touch healing practice. He described to me the remarkable sensations he felt. He talked about feeling like I'd poked him in the head, right between the eyes, like a lightning bolt, despite my not having touched him at all. He later told me how the shift in his energy lasted for some time after.

Later, after I'd returned home from Naramata, I began work at a church with a Healing Pathway group. I made an appointment. When I got off the table after that first appointment one of the women who had been working with me asked me if I was a healer. She said that the way my energy felt and the way I responded to the treatment made her assume that I was also a healer.

I had been interested in taking Healing Pathway training since my first experience with it in 2004, but other studies, work and family had taken precedence. After this and other experiences of the summer of 2008, I began looking into different energy healing modalities and doing a lot of reading. I was finally able to take a level one training in the Healing Pathway in the summer of 2009.

The discomfort I felt in my conversation with DC uncovers another block for me. In not wanting to sound too presumptuous, and perhaps burdened by how our culture teaches women to be humble, I would not name my own sense of call as a healer.

The United Church of Canada

"This business of healing bodies through prayer seems to upset us. But why? It is central to Jesus' ministry, and we claim to be the modern-day body of Christ. Could it be that we do not take Jesus' healing ministry seriously because we are simply too proud or afraid to enter the unfamiliar territory of the spiritual world, where we feel inexperienced and without control?"
Gordon Dalbey²⁶

Energy healing is a growing ministry in the United Church of Canada, and other denominations, as evidenced by recent books such as Kathy Edmison's *Growing a Healing Ministry: a resource for congregations & communities*, and comments in the most current edition of *This United Church of Ours* by Ralph Milton about the "exciting new development in the United Church... more and more groups are gathering to learn and practice the spiritual art of prayer and healing."²⁷ It's not new however. It's re-new. Healing was in the Hebrew Scriptures.²⁸ Even in the United Church context the United Church leadership training centre at Naramata has been developing and offering training in the Healing Pathway for 20 years.²⁹

And yet there is a disconnect. We have a training centre which "enables people to develop

26 Gordon Dalbey. "Recovering Healing Prayer." <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=1324> accessed March 18, 2010.

27 Ralph Milton. *This United Church of Ours, Third Edition*. (Kelowna: Woodlake Books, 2000.) 64. Accessed on-line Google books, March 25, 2010.

28 Examples include Exodus 4:6-8; 2 Kings 4:8-37; 2 Kings 5:1-9

29 Naramata Centre website, www.naramatacentre.net/programs-healingpath.asp. Accessed March 28, 2010.

the gifts and skills of healing hands within the Christian tradition, and fosters the development of healing ministries in congregations and other communities."³⁰ But I could find no mention of it or of healing ministry on the United Church's national web-site, let alone a theology of healing. On a corporate level healing appears to have been ignored. On a personal, in the pews, level it is often regarded with suspicion.

It is not the case that the United Church never talks about healing. On the contrary, we talk about it a lot. We talk about it in the context of reconciliation and healing with First Nations peoples around the issue of residential schools. We talk about the healing of creation.³¹ We talk about hope and healing. Occasionally someone mentions spiritual healing. But it's typically referenced in a broad non-specific sense. While ministries of energy-touch healing seem to be

"The conversation is important, if not vital, in coming to a comprehensive understanding of the church's mission of healing in a broken world. This mission is reportedly ordained by Jesus and described by Biblical scholar Walter Brueggemann as "our urgent human vocation."
Kathy Edmison

growing and many congregations offer healing ministries, I could find no official acknowledgement of them.

Now I'm not someone who typically feels the need for some kind of corporate nod. The diaconal ministry path that I'm on is often referred to as ministry from and to the margin, so I'm used to being on the edge. But it does give me some insight into some of the

personal reactions, and non-reactions, toward healing ministry. I have seen people all but recoil in horror at the offer of Healing Touch or Reiki as if they'd been flashed a sign of the occult. Some people believe this work to be unChristian, to have links to witchcraft and superstition.³² Somehow the Biblical stories of healing have not convinced them otherwise. For others, a new paradigm of healing simply seems in-credible.³³

I don't know if the United Church has deliberately not made any official statements about this ministry or if it has simply been overlooked. If the church came out with an official statement about energy-touch healing, it might be controversial. But I think it's worth the risk to truly live into our discipleship call and to support the good work that is already happening.

And so...

"Jesus was a healer... He was open to the divine, which made all the difference. It still does. When human beings open themselves to a power greater than their own, extraordinary things can happen. They can see illness as well as disease. They can see the human being before them and, in that person, see God." Pat Fosarelli³⁴

"The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade... they were highly regarded by the people... more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. As a result, people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter's shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by. Crowds gathered also from the

30 From the web-site of Naramata Centre. www.naramatacentre.net.

31 A search for "healing" on the national United Church website turns up many hits on touching on these two topics. Interestingly, I never found a hit on the Healing Pathway through the search engine on this site even narrowing the search to "healing pathway."

32 As noted by Harpur. 26. Edmison. 52.

33 Harpur. 26.

34 Pat Fosarelli. "Healing Faith." *America* 202, no. 2: 23. January 2010. 25. *MasterFILE Premier*, EBSCOhost (accessed March 19, 2010).

towns around Jerusalem, bringing their sick and those tormented by evil spirits, and all of them were healed." Acts 5:12-16

What began as a search through books became a search through personal story to discern my theology of healing. This is what I believe:

Our God is a God of healing. Through Jesus we are commissioned to go out and heal. When we connect to the Universal Life Force, which is God, and direct our loving compassion toward a world that is well, whole and complete, we will experience the mystery of healing. My task is to embrace my call to the ministry of and to the mystery of healing.

May it be so.

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