

## Christianity and Healthcare

Luke 10:30-37

5/1/2016

In this election season, we are hearing a lot about the question of how we will address the health care needs of Americans beginning in 2017. This is a terribly important issue and one about which we should care as Christians....

You might say, "Why on earth are you talking about this issue in church? What does Christianity have to do with health care?" I'm glad you asked! Do you know the most common thing we see Jesus doing in the gospels? It is healing the sick. Listen to how Matthew introduces Jesus' ministry: "Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues and proclaiming the good news of the kingdom and curing every disease and every sickness among the people. So his fame spread throughout all Syria, and they brought to him all the sick, those who were afflicted with various diseases and pains, demoniacs, epileptics, and paralytics, and he cured them." (Matthew 4:23-24) **There are 31 distinct individuals the gospels record as being healed by Jesus.**

Jesus was once asked what the most important commandments were. He said, as you well know, that we are to love the Lord with all our heart, mind and strength, and to love our neighbor as our selves. Then he told a parable to describe what love looks like, the Parable of the Good Samaritan. We remember the Jew was beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. He was ignored by the Levite and the Priest—perhaps they felt it wasn't their job to help the man. But a Samaritan sees the man and stops to help, pouring oil on, and bandaging, his wounds. He then takes him to Jericho where he provides for his ongoing care. Jesus said, "That's what love looks like."

Early Christians cared for the sick. After about 325 A.D. Christianity became the official religion of the Roman Empire....At this time the bishops of the church began building hospitals in every city where there was a cathedral so that the destitute and dying could have access to compassionate medical care, such as it was. Fast forward 1,400 years to

London in the 18th century where John Wesley and the early Methodists opened medical dispensaries and a medical clinic to care for those who could not afford medical care. In America it was churches that opened most of the hospitals built before 1940. These hospitals were initially built primarily to care for the poor, who often could not afford care. In Kansas City, Methodists built Bethany Medical Center. There was Trinity Lutheran Hospital and Baptist Medical Center, St. Joseph Medical Center (Catholic), St. Luke's (Episcopal) and Shawnee Mission Medical Center (Adventist). All of these denominations believed health care had something to do with Christianity.

Particularly after World War II, medicine began to really change in America....Specialists focused on providing medical treatments and surgeries that could not have been imagined even before. But this came at an increasing price. Hospitals were no longer primarily for the poor....in 1929 Blue Cross was unveiled at Baylor Medical Center in Dallas—a prepaid hospital plan. Blue Shield came shortly after providing pre-paid doctor's coverage....In 1940 10% of all Americans had health insurance. By 1955 75% of all Americans had health care coverage, most through their work, but this employer sponsored health care insurance created a problem when people retired. If their health care didn't continue after retirement, they lost health care coverage at the very time they were moving into the years they would need it the most.

**In 1965 President Johnson signed the Medicare Program into law.** Harry and Bess Truman were the first two recipients of Medicare cards. Medicaid was also started at that time to care for the very poor.

In the last few decades health care costs have skyrocketed. In 1970 the cost of healthcare in America was 75 billion dollars, by 2010 it was 2.6 trillion dollars and by 2021 it is expected to be 4.8 trillion dollars. So what are the causes of these dramatic increases in health care? Well there are a number. The experts say in general the cost of hospitals and all the new equipment that is needed, the technology needed was more expensive – MRI machines and such, increases cost of providers, medical waste disposal, and key thing was an increasingly unhealthy population; obesity, diabetes, heart conditions, etc. Another big change was we have greater expectations of medicine than our grandparents did. If my Grandfather had a sore knee he just lived with it – he didn't go get it scoped like I did and have a repair easily

done through an arthroscopic procedure. So this is a different way we think about medicine than we did years ago. So as costs went up many churches got out of the medical business and sold their hospitals to for-profit entities.

By 2007 many employers had stopped providing health care coverage due to these rising costs and a record number—47 million Americans—had no health care insurance – that was about 14% of the workforce that no longer had insurance through their employers or because costs were going up couldn't afford to buy private insurance for themselves. So this became a key campaign issue in 2008. And out of that came the Affordable Care Act which has reduced the numbers of uninsured. This last year the number of uninsured dropped to its lowest level in the history of our country—9% of Americans are uninsured, but that is the lowest number in 50 years, down from around 16% before the ACA. But the Affordable Care Act is not without its critics. Half of all Americans dislike the ACA, and the divide is largely, but not entirely, on party lines....Whether we either retain and repair the ACA or repeal and replace it, the problems that it has sought to address must continue to be addressed.

I want to end by pointing to three ways in which I believe your faith should impact health care and your health care choices. The first is our sense of personal responsibility for addressing health care as Christians. **The Apostle Paul notes in 1 Corinthians 6:19** that: "Your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God—you are not your own. For you were bought with a price; therefore glorify God in your body." He mentions this in the context of avoiding sexual immorality. But this idea that our body is both a gift from God, and that the Spirit dwells in us might nudge us to think about how we glorify God with our bodies, including taking care of ourselves through exercise and a healthy diet and avoiding abusing our bodies. This is so we don't become a drain on the system later in our lives. This is sort of a moral issue, if I'm not taking care of my body or if I'm abusing my body I'm going to probably use a larger portion of those health care resources that are out there in the years to come.

A second place where I think Christianity might impact health care for Christians has to do with how we view death. Unfortunately we don't always have those needed conversations ahead of time about what a person desires as their health starts to decline or when they begin the dying process.

These are not conversations that are easy and they are made more difficult if we wait until our loved one is in the hospital receiving heroic measures to prolong their life with no hope of quality of life. A significant amount of health care resources are spent on postponing death for people in the last months or days of their lives. One study from the Journal of the American Medical Association notes that the more spent on health care in the last days of someone's life, the worse their quality of life and hence their quality of death. So we need to have those talks now before we find ourselves in a desperate situation and emotion can overrule our logical thought process.

**We are so afraid of death** in this country and yet we as Christians should have a different perspective. What happened at Easter? Jesus rose from the dead. We believe in resurrection, we believe in hope, we believe that death is not the end. We believe that death is not the worst thing is ever the last thing or that death has the final word. We believe that Jesus meant it when he said "I go to prepare a place for you so that where I am there you may be also."

I personally not only believe this, I'm counting on it! So let me go when the time has come, because I can't wait to see what comes after this. And that's a Christian perspective we bring to end of life concerns. We've got to be able to talk about these things. As Christians we know that death is not the end so it doesn't need to be postponed forever. It's okay to die, when you trust in Christ and you know that you belong to him.

In 2 Corinthians 4 and 5 Paul offers a wonderful perspective on these earthly bodies. He calls our body a clay pot. This was like a Glad bag or Tupperware. People stored things in clay jars—they were made from mud, and could easily be thrown out. They were never meant to last forever. **Then he shifts metaphors in chapter 5 and says**, "We know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens." (2 Corinthians 5:1)

Finally, our faith must compel us to consider the health care needs of the vulnerable. That is, according to the Parable of the Good Samaritan, one dimension of what it means to love our neighbor as we love ourselves.... Whether you are a Republican or Democrat, I encourage you to see this as an issue that matters. Search for a candidate, or even challenge your candidate, to make sure that we're working for a health care solution that

helps everyone have access to some kind of health care coverage. Alleluia, Amen.

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In this passage, Jesus responds to the question “who is my neighbor?” with the tale of the Good Samaritan.

**Luke 10:30-37**

**New Revised Standard Version:**

Jesus replied with this story, “A man was going down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell into the hands of robbers, who stripped him, beat him, and went away, leaving him half dead. Now by chance a priest was going down that road; and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side. So likewise a Levite, when he came to the place and saw him, passed by on the other side. But a Samaritan while traveling came near him; and when he saw him, he was moved with pity. He went to him and bandaged his wounds, having poured oil and wine on them. Then he put him on his own animal, brought him to an inn, and took care of him. The next day he took out two denarii, gave them to the innkeeper, and said, ‘Take care of him; and when I come back, I will repay you whatever more you spend.’ Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of the robbers?” He said, “The one who showed him mercy.” Jesus said to him, “Go and do likewise.”

May God add a blessing to the reading, hearing and doing of this Word.