

**“Gotta Go Through It: Wellness”**  
**Chilson Hills Church, sermon, Oct 9, 2011**  
**By Scott Runyon, Deacon, seminary student**

In 1871, Horatio Spafford, a prosperous lawyer and devout Presbyterian church elder and his wife, Anna, were living comfortably with their four young daughters in Chicago. At their home in a north side suburb of Chicago, the Spafford's hosted and sometimes financially supported many guests. Spafford, a senior partner in a thriving law firm, invested in real estate on the north side of an expanding Chicago in the spring of 1871. In that year, the great fire of Chicago devastated the entire city. It also destroyed Spafford's sizable real estate investments.

Two years later the family decided to vacation with friends in Europe. At the last moment Horatio was detained by business, and Anna and their four girls went on ahead, sailing on the ocean liner *S.S. Ville de Havre*. Within twelve minutes on November 21, 1873, the luxury steamer sank in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean after being rammed by a British iron sailing ship. Anna was picked up unconscious on a floating spar, but the four girls drowned... The Spafford's son Horatio, was born by some accounts prior to and other accounts after the ocean liner tragedy, and he died at age four.

(from: <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/americancolony/amcolony-family.html> )

At this point, Horacio and Anna had been devastated by the loss of five young children and a business empire. We'll get back to the rest of Horacio and Anna's story in a little while. Let's turn now to our scripture for the day.

**Luke 4:14-19 (NRSV)** <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=184930261>

Then Jesus, filled with the power of the Spirit, returned to Galilee, and a report about him spread through all the surrounding country. He began to teach in their synagogues and was praised by everyone.

When he came to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, he went to the synagogue on the Sabbath day, as was his custom. He stood up to read, and the scroll of the prophet Isaiah was given to him. He unrolled the scroll and found the place where it was written:

'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
because he has anointed me  
to bring good news to the poor.  
He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives  
and recovery of sight to the blind,  
to let the oppressed go free,  
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.'

This passage in Luke is very interesting. It describes the inauguration of and encapsulates Jesus' ministry. It takes place in Nazareth of Galilee, the town where Jesus grew up. From all indications it was a highly populated Jewish land surrounded by territory occupied by non-Jews, or Gentiles. Here we have Jesus going to a local place of worship, called a synagogue. As was their practice, a prominent person would be given the opportunity to read scripture and comment on it. Jesus is given this honor and reads from the scroll of Isaiah, parts of chapter 61 and 58. Then he sits down to discuss what he just read. There are several things striking about this passage.

Isaiah 61 was a well known and cherished scripture of the Jewish people. However, Jesus uses it in a different way than was common at the time. They knew **Isaiah 61** <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=184930327> talked about the great day when the Anointed One, the Messiah, would come. They knew that the Messiah would bring good news for the oppressed, freedom to return home for captives, etc. However, Jesus highlights the error in their understanding of the Isaiah passage which gets them riled up. Their understanding was that they

were God's chosen people to the exclusion of the surrounding Gentiles, who they felt had moved in on land that was theirs by rite. They were looking for the day when the Messiah would come and give them back their land and make the Gentiles serve them, helping the Jews to flourish and become rich. According to Kenneth Bailey, this was a political and economic agenda that Jesus was not going to support, but speak out against.

After reading Isaiah, Jesus, provides two examples of Old Testament people, one a woman and the other a commander-in-chief of a foreign army. Neither of them were Jewish, yet they found favor with God over their Jewish counterparts, due to their faith, trust, and humility. Jesus was saying that the Jews would have to humble themselves and look outside their tight faith circle for spiritual leadership. This was heresy for the people listening to Jesus because of their political and economic interest.

On top of this, Jesus declares in no uncertain terms that he himself is the Messiah who will usher in the new era of God's kingdom on Earth. They are faced with a choice. They either accept that Jesus is the Messiah and humble themselves in the face of his teaching, or they declare him a heretic and follow their practice of killing those who have such disrespect for their religious and political goals. They chose the latter and ran Jesus out of town and tried to throw him off a cliff to his demise. But we read that he eluded them and got away, then began his public ministry. From this point onward... you could say from the very beginning of his public ministry, Luke writes of Jesus as a marked man heading toward the cross and eventual resurrection.

This is the setting and what is happening here. Now let's look at the content of what Jesus quotes from Isaiah and what that might mean for us today. He is harnessing from Old Testament prophetic literature a summary of the core of his life and ministry. It is a holistic ministry of healing and wellness with three components:

1. Bringing good news to the poor in spirit (PROCLAMATION of good news)
2. Offering recovery of sight to the blind (COMPASSION for the underprivileged)
3. Proclaiming release to captives (JUSTICE - letting prisoners return home)

We find here a literary device that was used commonly in Old Testament as well as New Testament writing. In these cases, we have a section of Scripture that includes parallel phrases at the top and bottom with the main point in the middle. In our Scripture, Compassion is in the middle indicating that Justice and Proclamation are secondary to Compassion. Here we can deduce that Compassion is a centerpiece of Jesus' ministry out of which flow Proclamation of the Gospel and providing Justice for those who are oppressed. We can find this consistent with Old Testament stories dating back to Abraham who was to always welcome outsiders with Compassion and hospitality.

We also read in the book of Acts how the early church was committed to Compassion as a focal point of their ministry. Seeing the needs of widows and others who were not being cared for in their community, they got creative. They responded by selling their property, giving it to the Apostles, who distributed the money so that "ALL NEEDS WERE MET" in their community. It is nothing for us to think about selling or buying a house. Sure it is a big deal, but it happens frequently. This wasn't the case in first century Palestine. Raise your hand if you have sold or purchased property in the past five years. Keep your hands up. Now raise your hand if you have bought or sold property in the past ten years, 20 years, 30 years. That is nearly everyone here. Land was incredibly important in a way we don't quite understand. How many of you are now living in a home that you inherited from a parent? Land was held from one generation to the next in Jesus' day, passed from father to son to grandson, to great grandson, etc. Land was of utmost importance for livelihood. So these early Christians made incredible personal sacrifices because of their call to Compassion so that others might be well. They not only followed Jesus, but they put into practice His teaching.

We, here at Chilson Hills, also understand this call to Compassion that brings wellness. We have it right in our church vision. Look on the front of The Herald. Our vision is:

**"Connecting together in Christ to serve all God's people, renewing ourselves through Jesus' teaching of love, healing and forgiveness."**

Serving all God's people means we turn our attention to people in need out there, outside our doors. Providing love, healing and forgiveness really only happens when we are alive with Compassion. Are we doing that? How can we do that better?

When we are faithful to follow in Jesus' footsteps, what is the impact of wellness on an individual? On a community? We build God's kingdom on this earth.

Back to our story about Horacio Spafford... He is an example of someone who was well.

After Horacio's four daughters died at sea, his wife Anna sent him a telegram: "Saved alone. What should I do?" After receiving the telegram, Horatio immediately left Chicago to bring his wife home. On the Atlantic crossing the sea, the captain of his ship called Horatio to his cabin to tell him that they were passing over the spot where his four daughters had gone down with the ship. As he passed over their watery grave, Horatio wrote these words, which have become one of the most popular and recognized hymns of the Christian church.

### **It Is Well With My Soul**

*When peace like a river, attendeth my way,  
When sorrows like sea billows roll;  
Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to know,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Refrain:*

*It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, with my soul,  
It is well, it is well, with my soul.*

*Though Satan should buffet, though trials should come,  
Let this blest assurance control,  
That Christ has regarded my helpless estate,  
And hath shed His own blood for my soul.*

*My sin, oh, the bliss of this glorious thought!  
My sin, not in part but the whole,  
Is nailed to the cross, and I bear it no more,  
Praise the Lord, praise the Lord, O my soul!*

*For me, be it Christ, be it Christ hence to live:  
If Jordan above me shall roll,  
No pang shall be mine, for in death as in life,  
Thou wilt whisper Thy peace to my soul.*

*But Lord, 'tis for Thee, for Thy coming we wait,  
The sky, not the grave, is our goal;  
Oh, trump of the angel! Oh, voice of the Lord!  
Blessed hope, blessed rest of my soul.*

*And Lord, haste the day when my faith shall be sight,  
The clouds be rolled back as a scroll;  
The trump shall resound, and the Lord shall descend,  
Even so, it is well with my soul.*

*Horatio Spafford, 1873*

What is it that would enable a man who had been through such tragedy to pen words of such hope and trust in God? He probably went through a time of deep despair, anger and bitterness. We could expect nothing less. He was a human being just like you and me, and he just lost his financial empire to a fire and his four daughters to the sea. But he didn't linger in despair. He went through the darkness and found God's peace flow over him. He found God's love and Compassion when it mattered most. It is evident that Horacio was well, having gone through tremendous loss and tragedy. God's healing was there for him -- healing his soul, truly healing him to the very essence of his being -- restoring him to wholeness. Not a wholeness like nothing had happened, but a wholeness that includes the scars of life, and all of the other life experiences through which Horacio had lived. He was well only because God is alive and working in this world. Even, and especially, in the middle of life's greatest challenges, God's love and Compassion are real and available to heal us and make us well.

## LIFE APPLICATION QUESTIONS

For Sunday, October 9, 2011's Sermon "Gotta Go Through It: Wellness"

**Foundational Scripture: Luke 4: 14-19**

<http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=184930422>

**Featured Scripture Reflection:** During Jesus' inauguration of ministry, Jesus highlights a holistic triage of healing that produces wellness: proclamation, justice advocacy, and compassion, with compassion as the centerpiece.

**Opening Icebreaker:** Share about a time when you experienced being whole and well.

### Scripture Questions

#### What is the scripture saying?

- Read **Luke 4 16-19**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=184930452> What images come to mind when you read this passage?
- Read **Luke 4:20-30**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=184930482> What words or phrases stand out to you when you read this passage? Jesus gives examples of God's grace being given to two people who were not Jewish. Why did hearing this cause the Jewish people to drive Jesus out of town and attempt to kill him?
- Read **Isaiah 61:1-6**. <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=184930517> How do verses 5-6 fit the rest? Why do you think that Jesus does not quote these in Luke chapter 4? <http://bible.oremus.org/?ql=184930561>

#### How is God speaking through Scripture?

- What is the "Good News" in these passages of Scripture?
- After discussing and pondering these passages, how do they affect you?
- How are these passages troubling, confusing, or challenging?

#### God's Word

- What is God's invitation to you?

#### A prayer

God, you are calling us to follow your example. Give us courage to follow. Show us clearly the course of action there is to take to be faithful to your call to bring genuine compassion to those who need it.