

Mid-Coast Presbyterian Church
Service for the Lord's Day ~ June 21, 2026
Led by the Men of MCPC



American Healthcare and Our Faith

*Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,
but those who are kind to the needy honor him
Proverbs 14:31*

Introduction

The MCPC Men's Faith Study is a monthly zoom gathering of men who are members and friends of the Church, who seek to look at the world around us and discuss topics we encounter as we strive to live faithful lives.

Over the course of the last year, we have frequently found ourselves discussing questions concerning health. Part of this, of course, has to do with the health challenges we face, as well as those affecting our families and friends. We have reflected on the role healing plays in the Gospel accounts of the ministry of Jesus, and we have tried to understand the state of our healthcare system.

It seemed to us that these discussions suggested an appropriate theme for our annual "men's service." The June 21 service was well received, and in response to the requests of a number of members, we offer here the three-member sermon given on that morning, titled "American Healthcare and Our Faith." First, Dick Reese presents thoughts as a medical practitioner, "The Broken Healthcare system." Bob Beringer reflects on "The Church and Healthcare, and John Ingram, recalls his journey through serious illness in "Becoming a Part of Christ's Healing Ministry." We hope you will find these three perspectives helpful in living through this important facet of our lives together.

Participants

Greeters: Rick Wilcox and Howard MacMullen

Guest Accompanist: Eileen Twiddy

Worship Leader: George Huggins

Liturgist: Bill Palmer

Message: Dick Reese, Bob Beringer and John Ingram

Benediction: Howard MacMullen

Zoom Projectionist: John Wilkerson

The Broken Healthcare System

Dick Reese

*Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,
but those who are kind to the needy honor him*

Proverbs 14:31

Good morning. The Men's monthly Saturday morning Zoom meetings have periodically discussed health care issues. This spring when we talked about the Health Care Crisis in America, as part of that discussion I put together a "problem list of issues." I suspect we all could generate similar lists.

I am not trying to bash the medical profession ... I was an active part of it for over 40 years. When we were in Cooperstown, I was on staff as an internist, PCP and subspecialist in infectious diseases at a non-profit teaching hospital. All physicians were on salary, and our hospital followed the Mayo Clinic model with a single shared medical record and multidisciplinary approach to cases. Although not perfect, it was a great place to work.

Then in 1999 when we moved to Maine, I taught clinical pharmacology at Maine's only medical school until I retired in mid 2013.

But this morning, I want to raise 6 key problem areas in American medicine. To do this fairly, I will be using material from an outstanding book entitled *Healing of America*, a recent report from the *Commonwealth Fund* and one medical journal article.

The first point I want to emphasize is that every other developed country has universal health care EXCEPT the United States.

And as far as I know, none of these countries has given up their universal health care because it didn't work!

This is so important I want to repeat it! ...

Every other developed country has universal health care- EXCEPT the United States!

Point 2... Despite spending more than any other country on health care, the U.S. is NOT leading the world in terms of optimal health results! In an excellent article in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, Dr. Stephen Shroeder at a major California medical center recently emphasized,

"There is a widening health gap in this country between those who are well-off and those who are vulnerable, and that is the major reason for the United States' relatively poor health performance, *compared with other countries*, is the poor health status of its lower socioeconomic classes."

He reminds all of us that, "the health of Americans cannot be improved unless everyone in the US has access to medical care." In other words, it seems to me that we must follow the Proverbs 14:31 passage: *we as a country need to be kind to the needy, the poor, by providing health care.*

Point three I believe many of us are led to believe that we, in America, always get the best care. Don't we? After all we spend the most! But this is not the case. Here are 2 common conditions that the 2025 *Commonwealth Fund* report emphasized:

The U.S. has the highest maternal mortality rate among developed, high-income nations. And globally, the U.S. ranks around 55th in deaths of pregnant mothers! How can this be...? This crisis is caused by profound racial disparities in health care and a lack of universal postpartum care. Furthermore, the U.S. has one of the highest infant mortality rates among developed nations, ranking 33rd out of the 38 countries studied!

Why? Because the poor don't get care. It is not surprising that no other country tries to emulate our health care system! Again, it seems to me that we must follow the Proverbs passage: *we as a country need to be kind to the needy, the poor, by providing health care.*

Point four- The author of the excellent book *Healing of America* emphasizes that the #1 issue for any health care system is a moral one. We, as a country, must answer the basic question: should we guarantee medical treatment to everyone?

The author goes on to say "If Americans have the will to fix our costly, unfair health care system, - the rest of the world can show the way."

All the rich developed countries have made the essential moral- and spiritual- decision to provide universal health care. And they spend far less on health care than the U.S.!

And, as an aside, the author reminds us that in 1965, the U.S. Medicare program was modeled on Canada's National Health Insurance program!

Point 5- Why is our health care so expensive? There are many factors, but a few key ones include:

- The for-profit insurance industry: Private insurers spend about 20% of their fees in marketing & administration -versus Medicare which spends 3% of fees for administration!
- The U.S. medical system is complex & very fragmented
- Preventive measures in the U.S. are woefully underutilized, or not available, or not covered by insurance
- Drug costs remain a challenge
- The Corporatization of medicine. Many walk-in clinics, urgent care centers and hospital chains are owned by corporations raising concerns of “profits over patient care.”
- Malpractice reform is needed
- And did you know that approximately a half million families file for bankruptcy annually in the U.S. due to medical issues, expenses, or illnesses?

Studies indicate that medical debt contributes to roughly two thirds of all personal bankruptcies, making it a leading cause of financial failure for American households, disproportionately affecting the middle class. In contrast, bankruptcies caused by medical expenses are rare in most countries with universal health care!

And my last point: There is a lack of political will in Washington to even address universal health care, and perhaps a feeling health care may be “just too complex to fix.” Some critics argue that universal health care is a form of socialism, though I have never met a senior citizen who wants to give up his/her Medicare.

In conclusion, I suspect we can all agree that health care reform is complicated with many competing interests, but that certainly is not a reason to give up on improving the system.

And remember [Proverbs 14:31](#)

*Those who oppress the poor insult their Maker,
but those who are kind to the needy honor him*

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The Church and Healthcare

Bob Beringer

Many people are surprised to learn that more than one third of Jesus' earthly ministry involved healing those who were ill in body, mind and spirit. When John the Baptist sent a message to Jesus from his jail cell on death row asking, "Are you really the One who is to come, or shall we look for another?" Jesus responded by saying, "Tell John that the lame walk, the blind see, and the sick are healed."

The early Christians continued to make the healing ministry of prayer, laying on of hands, and anointing with oil an important part of their carrying the Gospel message of God's love to the world.

In the settling of America it was people of faith who pioneered the building of hospitals and clinics across the land. Think of how many hospitals, even today, are named for St. Luke, St. Mary or Columbia Presbyterian Hospital in New York City. The same was true in the late 19th century when all churches became involved in Overseas Mission. I think of a famous Presbyterian mission family by the name of Moffett, who built hospitals all across Korea that cared for even the poorest people.

But in the mid 20th century, viewing the remarkable discoveries in science, biblical scholars began a more critical study of how the Bible came to be written, and began to challenge the authenticity of the healing miracles performed by Jesus and his followers. For many decades the emphasis was on Jesus' preaching and teaching---but not on his healing ministry. All talk of healing was left to the “Holy Rollers,” or Oral Roberts’ television show.

However, beginning in the 1970's, with the worldwide re-awakening to the importance of the Holy Spirit in the life of faith, the Church once more began to see the importance of the healing ministry. Services of Healing and Wholeness were developed that offered prayer, anointing with oil, the laying on of hands, and Holy Communion became a regular part of church life with the clear understanding that not everyone would be instantly cured.

Becoming a Part of Christ's Healing Ministry

John D. Ingram

Our denomination introduced a new lay ministry called Parish Nursing. Nurses of all ages who understood their profession as a calling, and not just a job, were given the opportunity to offer their members regular blood pressure checks, or instruction for women in how to perform their own breast exams, or for men how they could more effectively deal with troubling prostate problems.

Realizing that one on one support for those going through illness, loss, or crisis was so important, many churches became involved in Stephen Ministry, an interfaith training of lay people to come alongside those in need with skills in active listening, a knowledge of biblical promises, and an ability to pray with those with whom they were working.

If we truly believe that every human life is precious in the sight of God, it follows that people of faith must be in the forefront of seeing that even the poorest and most needy people receive simple basic medical care. If you take away nothing else from this service today, please begin seeing healthcare in America not as one more political issue, but as a moral and spiritual imperative for the followers of Jesus Christ.

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Last year, our service also had a focus on health care, but this year our focus shifts a bit. Given the state of the American healthcare system that Dick has eloquently laid out, and the historic role of Christians and Christian denominations related by Bob, What Can We and What Should We do, as Christians and as a church, to help fix the broken system and minister to our brothers and sisters in Christ?

I've previously related my experience with serious illness, and the treatments I received from the National Cancer Institute. Today I'd like to tell you about trying to get my Mom, who was experiencing progressively worse dementia, to gently understand my illness during that time. I told her what I was dealing with, and that it was life threatening, but I don't think she grasped it fully as I was going through it. Looking back, I have come to think of her affliction as a small blessing from God. What I received from her was her usual outpouring of love and devotion. As my inspiration and best example of someone with strong faith, she prayed unceasingly for me to God every day. Although her good memories of me and Carol and her family and close friends stayed with her every day of her life, I don't think my sickness was heavy on her mind. I believe that she lifted this burden to God for assistance while staying happy, grateful and at peace. Mom also had strong belief in Angels sent from God, and told me they would be with me. So it is my belief that God protected both her and me during our illnesses. My Mother's love and prayers were instrumental to my healing.

Advances and breakthroughs in health care because of medical science, such as what benefitted me, would truly qualify as miracles in biblical times. These advances continue today, and I believe the hand of the Divine has guided the course. The blind have been made to see, the afflicted have been healed, and these truths are just as miraculous as the stories recounted in the bible. Therapies which look promising in treating pancreatic cancer through mRNA vaccinations, and treatments for the worst diseases from diabetes to Alzheimer's dementia are possibilities in our lifetimes because of God's involvement through his talented servants, and because of His love for us.

One thing we can do specifically to aid health care outcomes in our imperfect system is more focused prayer and active blessings. This made a big difference to me. In addition to recounting my Mom's intercessions today, I mentioned last year how central the prayers of MCPC were to my recovery from illness. Verse 15 from the fifth chapter of the letter of James concerning the Prayer of Faith tells us this: “¹⁵ And the prayer offered in faith will make the sick person well; the Lord will raise them up. If they have sinned, they will be forgiven.”

Several times during my treatments and surgeries, I had prayers conducted over me and with me by Chaplains at hospitals, and I recall more than once being anointed with oil and blessed with laying on of hands. This brought me comfort and peace at the time and helped make me “right with God” before big medical events. Did this cure me? Only God knows, but I believe it made a big difference in my recovery and in my life. We are all capable of doing this for people in need, and I think it helps fix an issue in the health care system by prioritizing both the mental and physical healing of people and offering help beyond what medical professionals provide to patients. This is Spiritual help, and as Bob related it has been a fundamental principle of our hospitals and systems.

As a Deacon, I can relate that we are bringing thoughts like this to the Board of Deacons to look at how we can make our existing ministry more relevant to the furthering of better health in our area. We have done the laying on of hands, and we have actively prayed for people with health challenges. Both the session and Deacons can look at implementing more formal prayers for the sick, anointing and laying on of hands for those who would like it in our church and community. Another thing we are doing is to clarify and reestablish the mission and purpose of the Shepherds/Sheep program for our congregation. This could help increase our assistance for MCPC members with health challenges by invigorating a current program. This is very much aligned with the Deacons ministry of compassion, witness, and sharing the redeeming love of Jesus Christ.

New things that we might consider doing could help answer the question of “What should we do?” to assist the health care system. New initiatives could require more support and involvement from us, so would need to be looked at to see if they are right for our church, given our current commitments. Possibilities include having focused services of healing, and offering potential training of lay persons for new programs like a Parish Nursing initiative, or a Stephen Ministry at MCPC.

Stephen Ministry is a Christ-centered lay caregiving program that trains everyday congregation members to provide confidential, one-to-one emotional and spiritual support to people experiencing difficult life crises, such as grief, divorce, illness, or job loss. The training is extensive, and would require committed involvement of participants and a strong desire to make a difference in people's lives. But such training, based in scripture, might help us produce “difference-makers” who could actively help fix some of what is broken in our health care system. As Paul said in his second letter to Timothy, chapter 3, verse 17, this type of training and commitment could help us “so that the servant[s] of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.”

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Mid-Coast Presbyterian Church

Pastor – Rev. Diane Hoppe Hugo

The mission of Mid-Coast Presbyterian Church is to be in partnership with God to transform ourselves, our communities, and our world.

Service for the Lord's Day ~ June 21, 2026

Service led by The Men of MCPC

Welcome: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you.

And also with you.

Lighting of the Christ Candle & A Time of Silence

We invite you to a time of silent meditation and companionship with God.

Call to Worship *(responsive)*

Leader: When the road ahead feels long and uncertain,

All: God walks beside us.

Leader: When fear and grief weigh heavy on our hearts,

All: Christ meets us with peace and hope.

Leader: When a broken world needs healing,

All: God's love still rises among us.

Leader: Come, let us worship the God who never leaves us alone!

Prelude

Hymn #370 *(please rise)* "This Is My Father's World"

Call to Reconciliation: If we say we have no sin, the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sin, God is faithful and just to forgive all our sins.

Prayer of Confession, responsively

Based on Psalm 130

Leader: Out of the depths, I cry to you, O Lord!

All: Lord, hear the voices of your people.

Leader: Let your ears be attentive to the voice of our supplications.

All: If you, O Lord, should mark iniquities, who could stand?

Hope in the Lord, for with the Lord, there is steadfast love!

Silence is kept.

Assurance: As far as the east is from the west, as far as the north is from the south, God has removed our transgressions from us. **In Jesus Christ we are forgiven!**

Response: # 447, sung twice

Glory to God

**We are forgiven. We are forgiven. Thanks be to God.
Thanks be to God.**

**We are forgiven. We are forgiven. Thanks be to God.
Thanks be to God.**

Prayer for Illumination *(unison)* Lord God, help us to turn our hearts to you, and to hear the words you speak to us, through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Lessons Proverbs 14:31, Mark 1:29-34 & John 11:2-6

Come Holy Spirit (silence is kept). This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

James 5:13-14 and James 2: 14-17

Come Holy Spirit (silence is kept). This is the Word of the Lord.

Thanks be to God.

Sermon “American Healthcare and Our Faith”

The Broken Healthcare System, Dick Reese

The Church and Healthcare, Bob Beringer

Becoming a Part of Christ’s Healing Ministry, John Ingram

Response of Faith *(unison).*

From “We Come to You for Healing, Lord” Glory to God #796

We come to you for healing, Lord of body, mind, and soul, and pray that by your Spirit's touch, we may again be whole. As once you walked through ancient streets and reached toward those in pain, we know you come among us still with power to heal again. You touch us through physicians' skills, through nurses' gifts of care, and through the love of faithful friends, who lift our lives in prayer.

Hymn #792 *(please rise) “There Is a Balm in Gilead”*

Sharing Our Joys & Concerns

We resolve to pray for each other, our community and our world at

10:10 am or pm —

*10:10 being the time we worship on the Lord’s Day. Join in whenever you
can remember to do so.*

Prayers of the People and Lord’s Prayer

(using “debts/debtors” Glory to God p.35)

Invitation to a Time of Offering: God has abundantly blessed us, and calls us as a community of faith to bless others. Let us remember that it is more blessed to give than to receive...

Silence is kept.

Prayer Of Dedication: Merciful God, we offer with joy and thanksgiving a portion of what you have given us. Receive these gifts in the name of the Christ who gave himself for us. Amen.

Hymn #772 *(please rise) “Live Into Hope”*

Charge God is Good-**All the Time** All the Time- **God is Good**

Postlude

Dismissal Benediction

Howard MacMullen

We go forth now under the Mercy of the God who made us in love: the same God who created the world, and all that is in it; the same God who made us to care for that world; the same God who took pity on us when we fell away from our created purpose; the same God who came to rescue us from ourselves; the same God who suffered for us, died for us, and rose from death that we might be forgiven, healed and restored, now and forevermore in that same Love. Let the Church say, “AMEN!”

***Please stay for coffee and let us share our lives and faith
with one another.***