

Lose Not Your Saltiness!

**Arden Wood Talk for Annual Meeting and Graduation
April 28, 1991**

OPENING

Today we gather to commemorate two events, the graduation of nurses and the annual meeting of Arden Wood. In essence, however, we come together to commemorate something that is at the core of these two events – Christian healing. The nurses graduating here today have made a momentous commitment, one that anyone just beginning the journey can hardly fathom. But they are not alone in this innocence. Anyone who has ever entered the practice of Christian healing begins with relatively little appreciation of what is required and what it means to the world. Even those who have made this practice their life work will confess a relative ignorance of the magnitude of its meaning. The organization whose annual meeting we celebrate today has learned much about what is required for successful spiritual healing, and it stands as a ready testament to the constant introspection and refinement necessary for accomplishment. The graduating nurses and this facility have undergone in the last few years an important re-evaluation regarding their practices and approaches to see just how closely they follow the requirements of a truly spiritual healing approach. This has been a sobering as well as an enlightening process, and no one should underestimate the dedication that has been demanded of the trustees, administrators, staff, and nurses in undertaking this task. It is all too easy in the practice of Christian healing to slip inadvertently away from the radical demands of spirituality and into the ways and means of the world. Hence the title of my talk: “Lose not your saltiness.”

JESUS' COMMAND

Most of you will recognize this title as a paraphrase of a remark, perhaps a warning, that Jesus gave to his disciples centuries ago. While I would not be presumptuous enough to compare what I am going to say this afternoon with one of our Master's sermons, I do think comparisons can be drawn between the audiences and times. Whether the world recognizes it or not, those of you gathered here represent a rather remarkable body of individuals. Most of you have been practitioners of a healing method that is not only variant of the world's accepted practice but in many ways challenging to it. You have undertaken to challenge the very assumption of matter's reality, and for this the world is not particularly understanding. Jesus' audience centuries ago was not made up of the world's famous and empowered people because those people had too much to give up to be receptive to his message. Jesus' followers and those to whom he successfully taught his healing method were ordinary people in one sense, extraordinary only in their humility, faith, obedience, and spiritual receptivity. To Jesus these people, rather than the other,

were the salt of the earth. You are the salt of the earth every bit as much as they were, and it is important to understand and accept your saltiness.

Why did Jesus refer to salt? What was so important about salt? First of all, this remark by our Master began a brief discussion of the disciples' relation to the world. Included in that discourse was another image, being the 'light of the world.' But by calling his disciples the 'salt of the earth' Jesus referred to the Christian's ability to keep the world from spoiling or being tasteless. Salt was treasured as a preservative, and the intimation here is that the world would eventually come to destruction were it not for the qualities of real Christianity. Society easily becomes corrupt through greed, lust, and indifference. These forces lead to decay, and they are not stayed unless a preservative is added. The Interpreter's Bible makes an interesting observation about this passage: "Ponder the method. There is no despair because the group is small: a pinch of salt is effective out of all proportion to its amount. There is no hermit strategy: the disciples are to stay in the world, touching even its unworthy life if they would redeem it. There is no call to a sensational witness: salt is inconspicuous, ordinary, and admixed with common things. The proposal is for a day-by-day witness for Jesus; the implied promise is that again the city shall be saved by ten righteous men." (Gen. 18:32)

Ponder the warning. In William Thomson's **The Land and the Book** there is an account of a merchant in Sidon who bought quantities of salt from the marshes of Cyprus, and hid them in houses on a remote mountain to avoid payment of the tax. But the floor of the houses was common earth, and soon the salt by that contact lost its saltiness. It was then used to make the hard surface on the road. The Christian either redeems the world, or the world robs him of his Christianity ... The warning is solemn: Jesus told his followers that they might lose the gift and grace which he had given, and that then they would be no better than a roadway for the casual traffic of the world. They would need to pray and discipline themselves if his word was to find fulfillment: "Have salt in yourselves, and have peace one with another."

Jesus was talking to people who knew salt. It was good for one quality; when that quality was gone, it was of no earthly use. We know that the Master was a man of immense spiritual discernment and perception; what was he seeing in the task facing his disciples; what could he perceive about the future?

CHALLENGE TO CHRISTIAN HEALING

Jesus knew that to have the desire to be a disciple was an easier commitment than actually having to practice discipleship. Nowhere in Jesus' teachings do we find him recommending that the disciples withdraw their contact or interaction with the world. The very message of Christianity involves redeeming the world, bringing to light its true spiritual nature. But Jesus also knew all too well the challenges the world presented to the disciple as he or she

engaged it. Within his closest circle he foresaw how doubt would neutralize Thomas, compromise would destroy Judas, and fear would cause denial by Peter. In the eagerness of his disciples to spread the good news of the Gospel was the inherent need for wisdom in doing so. He taught obedience and fidelity to God, an understanding of the way God works and how that differed from human ways and means. He warned that compromise with mammon would negate the desire to serve the Lord. He counseled that trusting in inferior means brought inferior ends. And he cautioned that laying up material treasures would provide no security. In short Jesus instructed his disciples how to be in the world but not of it.

Perhaps the most distinguishing mark of success in his ministry was that of healing. Healing was evidence that the Christian not only embraced the teaching but could demonstrate it. More than any other Christian practice, healing evidenced spiritual growth and material sacrifice. One cannot exist without the other. Spiritual growth only occurs when the issues of and reliance on materiality wane in our lives. Mary Baker Eddy, an ardent disciple of our Master, recognized this need. "A great sacrifice of material things," she wrote, "must precede this advance spiritual understanding. The highest prayer is not one of faith merely; it is demonstration. Such prayer heals sickness, and must destroy sin and death." (S&H pg 16) "Our Master's first article of faith propounded to his students was healing," she observed, "and he proved his faith by his works. The ancient Christians were healers. Why has this element of Christianity been lost? Because our systems of religion are governed more or less by our systems of medicine. The first idolatry was faith in matter." (S&H pg 145)

Most of us here understand that the widespread reinstatement of Christian healing came with the discovery of Christian Science. But why did healing, which was so vital to the practice and spread of Christianity in its primitive days, disappear? By a stroke of good luck, or so it seemed. After decades of persecution and intolerance, Christianity suddenly found itself socially and politically acceptable through the Edict of Milan in 313 AD. The Roman Emperor, Constantine, converted to Christianity and made it the state religion. Immediately large numbers of people flooded the ranks of the faithful however bringing with them few of the sacrifices of a Christian lifestyle and a lot of the baggage of materiality. Within a relatively short period of time, what had been a small group of radical practitioners of the kingdom of heaven became a large body of adherents of the earthly kingdoms. The church was forced to compromise its zealous adherence on things of the spirit and find accommodation for the world's values. The term for what happened to the church is called 'acculturation.' Specifically it means, in this context, that the church lost the practice of spiritual healing through 1) the secularization of Christian thought and practices, 2) the mixture of pagan, Jewish, and Christian doctrines, and 3) the obstruction by the church of public access to the Bible. Mrs. Eddy puts it more succinctly in her sermon Christian Healing, "in proportion as the personal and material element stole into religion, it lost Christianity and the power to heal...." (Hea pg 3)

ALERTNESS TO DUTY

If we do not wish to see this travesty repeated, what do we need to do? Simply we need to do what Arden Wood, in conjunction with the larger nursing field, has been doing for the last several years. We need to be alert to the subtle ways we compromise our spiritual healing ministry by embracing human ways and means and material practices. Again I should reiterate that the desire to maintain our integrity as disciples of Christian healing is not in question. But it takes more than good desires. Through the process of honest self-examination guided by the standards of Spirit we must constantly evaluate how closely our human practices measure up to our divine ideals. The genius of Jesus' teaching was the human and divine coincidence, that is, the understanding that "divinity embraces humanity in Life and its demonstration." (S&H pg 561) Jesus demonstrated that what was true spiritually could be practiced humanly, redeeming human experience and lifting it to a divine standard of thought and operation. Our Leader was consistent on the need not to drift off into metaphysical abstractions but to demand of human expression ever-higher standards of action until the human was transformed by the divine. **The Manual of the Mother Church** (pg 42) requires that Christian Scientists daily handle the aggressive mental suggestions that would compromise our practice of Christianity. Our alertness to duty includes never being made to forget nor neglect our obligations to God, to our Leader, and to mankind. We live for all three: our duty to God to be His image and expression and manifest Her attributes and nature; our duty to our Leader to carry on the practice of her discovery by maintaining the integrity of its standards; our duty to mankind to present the revolutionary kingdom of heaven which transforms matter not just makes it more enjoyable.

Our alertness to duty requires that we maintain within ourselves the clear focus and purpose of Christianity – demonstrating the kingdom of heaven on earth. While we need to find ever increasingly effective ways of reaching humanity with this message, we must recognize that the message is meant to lift humanity above itself and not merely to fit into the commonly accepted practices of the world. *Primitive Christianity was lost to the world for a while because of accommodation not because of persecution or its radical message.* Over the years in the practice of Christian Science we have had to be alert to the tendency of operating increasingly like the human models of health care. We have had to be alert that the model of psychological counseling did not replace the radical practice of Christian Science treatment that lifted the belief from the patient rather than fixing it on him. We have had to be alert that the model of medical nursing care did not replace the purity of Christian Science nursing that ministered to the spiritual wholeness and completeness of the patient rather than accepting the material evidence and tending to it. We have had to be alert that the model of nursing homes did not replace the integrity of Christian Science facilities which provide for an atmosphere of spiritual advancement and increasing utility rather than material decline and decay. Most of all we have had to be alert to cherish healing and wholeness as the natural condition of man rather than inevitable incurability and deterioration.

It should not sound alarmist to say that again Christian healing faces the threat of obscurity if we understand that this challenge presents a wonderful opportunity. To paraphrase Mrs. Eddy, we do not half remember this in the sunshine of prosperity; challenges bring great rewards and through tribulation we enter the kingdom (S&H pg 66) What challenges are presented to us as Christian healers should make us all the more resolved to look deep into our practice of healing and recommit ourselves to the type of spiritual growing that underlies healing. We are extremely fortunate to have readily available our textbooks for Christian healing. We need to become more familiar with their counsel and direction. Interestingly the practice of Christian healing did not totally disappear from the human scene with the increasing secularization of the Roman church. There were mavericks and reformers in the church that devoted long hours to meditation and prayer and kept the flame of Christian healing alive for more than 1200 years after the Edict of Milan. They resisted the worldly policies of the Vatican. Even the name sake of San Francisco, Francis of Assisi urged Christians to follow a life of humility in contrast to the worldly power and wealth being sought by the medieval church. He performed healing works that exemplified a strong sense of love and meekness as well as the recognition that God is the healing power. Most Christians are unaware that the Eastern Orthodox church never lost the practice of spiritual healing and the writings of the church contain a few of the first recorded headings by women.

KEEPING THE FAME

Why were these Christians able to keep this essential practice of Christianity alive in face of such a different focus by the medieval church? Simply, they caught the message of the Gospel and committed their lives to it. The message of the Gospel that Jesus taught and lived declared that God lives through man and all His creation. As Christian Scientists we might say that the Gospel proclaimed the Truth of Being, the unity of God and man, the at-one-ment of God and His idea that establishes the perfection and harmony of all life. The 'good news' is that materiality and its sense of being is a total fabrication that need no longer hold creation in terror. The presence of God, or the Christ and Holy Ghost, shows that God creates, constitutes, and governs all creation. What joy should be in that recognition! We are never separate or apart from our divine Source, and that Source is constituting every aspect, function, and faculty of our being. This gospel also strips off the disguise of matter showing it not to be the substance that it claims to be. As long as the Holy Ghost burns within us as much as it did those early Christians we can not be acculturated or absorbed into the ways and means of material sense.

In the beginning of my talk I mentioned several characteristics that probably went skipping by almost unnoticed. Those characteristics I think constitute our saltiness. They are: humility, faith, obedience, and spiritual receptivity. Humility is the crux of Christian healing, for it is through humility that we access the divine power. Mrs. Eddy once wrote, "That individual is the best healer who asserts himself the least, and thus becomes a

transparency for the divine Mind, who is the only physician; the divine Mind is the scientific healer." (Mis pg 59) No one understood better what it meant to be a transparency than did Jesus. Humility was the central theme of his healing ministry; he said, "Of mine own self I can do nothing; the Father in me, he doeth the works." Jesus lived for his Father, so that his Father, the one God, could be better understood by others. There was no sense of self-importance, no egotism regarding his place and purpose, no struggle for power or prestige, no compromise with worldly ways and means in order to be more accepted. What compromises Jesus made were for the advancement of spiritual good. Jesus taught that the focus in healing needed to be on God not on man, and he had supreme faith in the power of his God.

Of the several traits he commended in those he healed, none was more acknowledged than faith. Faith to Jesus was not mere hope that God would save man, it was a spiritual understanding and conviction of the nature of God to be Love, always present, always tending to and caring for His creation. Faith in God is focused on what God is and does and is not moved by the various claims and challenges of material sense. We do not know much about most of the people healed by Jesus, but what we do know and what Jesus recognized in them was their total trust in divine power. Most of these people probably did not have the degree of understanding of God that you have, but they believed with all their heart that God was all powerful. 'To believe' in Hebrew means 'to be firm and constant,' never wavering in one's trust in and love of God. Whatever shortcomings we may feel hinder our efforts in spiritual healing can be overcome by recognizing that the omnipotence of God is capable of providing whatever we need to know or do in any given circumstance. Mrs. Eddy writes about faith this way in purportedly one of her favorite passages, "When we come to have more faith in Spirit than in matter, more faith in living than in dying, more faith in God than in man, then no material suppositions can prevent us from healing the sick and destroying error." (S&H pg 368)

Loving God by having faith in Him and striving to do His will is what obedience is all about. Obedience is not servility or mindless submission to something we do not understand. Obedience is voluntary compliance with authority, in this case a uniting with divine authority and power. In Christian healing obedience unites man with his divine Source and its infinite power and strength. Mrs. Eddy writes of Jesus, "By his obedience to God, he demonstrated more spiritually than all others the Principle of being. Hence the force of his admonition, 'If ye love me, keep my commandments.'" (S&H pg 25) If we could understand that obedience is the willing subjection to divine Principle and its laws, we would realize a life governed by spiritual statutes, totally untouched by material theories, beliefs, and prognoses. Loving God, loving our Master for what he demonstrated for us involves keeping the divine commandments, not just the ten in Exodus but all directives given in the teaching of primitive Christianity.

Our desire to know the teaching of primitive Christianity, or the Christianity that Jesus and his disciples taught, underlies our spiritual receptivity. To find out about those teachings requires a spiritual inquisitiveness and integrity of thought. Jesus warned about accepting only the surface appearance or form of things and encouraged his listeners to go deeper in their evaluation of life. He wanted his followers to think for themselves, from the basis of Spirit. Our Leader in the opening pages of the Christian Science textbook remarks that “the time for thinkers has come.” (S&H pg vii) Thinking is not some academic process. Thinking requires at its core the desire to know the truth. Hence thinking and to a greater extent spiritual receptivity requires us to go back to the divine source. When we are asked to accept theories, doctrines, or directions our job as spiritual thinkers is to evaluate what is asked of us by divine standards of thought found in the Bible and in our textbook, Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures. All truth is consistent with revelation. What is accurate can be substantiated in the Bible and must be concordant with it. In Mrs. Eddy’s day, and even more so today, some argued that anyone’s revelation was just as valid as anyone else’s. But Mrs. Eddy always held that revelation to be valid must be consistent and concordant with the thread of revelation that ran throughout all time and could be found in the Scriptures. To some history is a stumbling block to the schemes of the present, but history repeats itself when its valid lessons are ignored. Hence the necessity of each Christian disciple knowing for oneself the teaching of primitive Christianity and the timeless directions it offered.

We stand at a crucial crossroads in human history. As primitive Christians we are being offered two directions, the road less traveled and the highway of human convenience. There is a passage that is well known and often quoted that I would like you to listen to again with new ears. The passage concludes Mrs. Eddy’s first address to her followers in The Mother Church:

Beloved children, the world has need of you, – and more as children than as men and women: it needs your innocence. unselfishness, faithful affection, uncontaminated lives. You need also to watch, and pray that you preserve these virtues unstained, and lose them not through contact with the world. What grander ambition is there than to maintain in yourselves what Jesus loved ,and to know that your example more than words, makes morals for mankind! (Mis pg 110)

We need your saltiness now, more than ever.

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