

The Healers' Chapel

An Adult Teaching Tale

By Tina Hahn and Ellen Rolfes

In the midst of a crowded urban space along a mighty river, there lived a grove of old oak trees that shared deeply woven roots. For many, many years the branches silently protected the soul of a healing center, a venerable hospital really. It was a different kind of place because it celebrated life and focused its forces on nurturing life in all people in order to make them grow stronger and more vibrant.

It was in the family care center of this very hospital that our story began – a waiting room where a man and woman stood in a corner, trying to comprehend the news that their daughter was there with a critical injury. Shocked into a fearful silence, the couple fought to breathe and fought to form thoughts about the next moment or the long future if their adult child were not part of their physical existence. They felt helpless. They were told all they could do was wait.

A kind, wise nurse who had supported countless families through health crises placed her hands over the hands of the couple. She gently suggested they might want to visit The Healers' Chapel in the hospital and explained many found comfort there. Like the oak trees that protected and provided a strong foundation for the hospital, the hospital likewise was the caretaker of this chapel – this sacred space – which offered solace and transcendence in the midst of an uncertain, swirling world. It was a place where anyone, no matter what faith, could go to pray – to petition for a healing circle around their loved ones who needed their health returned – and to ask for life.

The stunned man and woman looked at each other with questioning eyes. The woman, the mother, found her voice and said she wanted to seek out this chapel, but the man, the father, said he didn't think he could pull himself away from the area where the doctors and nurses were working to enable the daughter to live.

“We need to pray – we *must* pray,” the woman said, pleading with her partner to go with her. She seemed on the verge of a breakdown, so the man finally agreed to accompany her.

When they entered The Healers’ Chapel, the two immediately felt as though they were being embraced by a soothing and powerful presence. A natural clearing in a grove of trees that reached high up to the sky, the chapel was quiet except for the sound of the water – an indoors stream which symbolized the strength and continuity of the community’s mighty river. A number of people were in the chapel, some praying and others enjoying the chapel’s soothing stream, which was lined with beautiful stones.

It appeared that every kind of person imaginable was drawn to this space – those who were sick themselves, their family, and their friends; doctors, nurses, and other hospital staff members; young and old, people of means, and people without great wealth. Their facial expressions mirrored a peace, a unity, and a commitment that the couple didn’t immediately understand, but for some reason the couple felt safe and welcome.

After standing in silence for several moments in the chapel, the mother of the injured daughter said she wanted to pray. However, the father suddenly experienced a change of demeanor and his words were charged with fear.

“What is happening here? I’m *always* the one in control. I protect my family, my friends, my career and business interests, and my community. I have influence and power. I ensure all is right with the world for everyone and everything in my world. Now I feel powerless – and you want me to pray? I don’t know how to do this. Is this really the answer? Is there not something *more* we can do?”

People in The Healers’ Chapel were so concerned and so sad for the man. Stunned, his wife dropped her head in prayer and eventually turned to go back to the waiting room.

The couple's hospital vigil continued for days and nights, seemingly without end. The parents could not bring themselves to leave the hospital, although the mother found much strength from her many visits to The Healers' Chapel. In fact, she seemed more vibrant – more filled with life each day – although she got little physical rest. The father became lost in his own pain and was almost unrecognizable as the leader his family, friends, and colleagues had known before. His inner struggles were evident, but words of comfort and encouragement offered by those who cared did not help or comfort him.

One day when he was feeling completely hopeless, the father found his way back to The Healers' Chapel. He stood and watched other people in the sacred space as they almost visibly were enveloped by some unseen force. The man observed what appeared to be major differences between the many people present, but despite those differences, even in languages, they were finding peace from their concerns and sharing an unmistakable unity – an understanding of each other's feelings and difficulties.

“These folks must be strangers, and yet they are reaching out and ministering to each other,” the father thought to himself. His observances ended abruptly, however, and his utter despair over his daughter's health returned. He dropped his face in his hands and began to weep. He experienced such a tremendous release, and he began to pray. At one point in his petition he felt his hands and back tingle. When he finally lifted his head, he realized the individuals he had observed in the chapel had quietly formed a circle around him and were praying, too. Two people had stepped forward and had placed their hands upon his hands and his back. The man felt the power of the community of people and their combined requests for help on his behalf.

“We are all put on this earth to share our journeys, our joys and triumphs, our pain and fears. You are not alone,” one person from the circle said. “We are standing with you and

praying for you.” The father felt both humbled and inspired – and his hope for life restored. The father looked from face to face and repeated the words “thank you” over and over.

At that moment, the man’s wife entered the chapel and her face was lighted with pure joy. “Come with me. The doctors and nurses say our daughter has turned the corner. She is reaching for life. Life!”

The couple hurried off, and the others remained in the chapel to continue with prayers of healing and gratitude under those trees. The daughter did, indeed, recover, but this marked the beginning of our story, not the end.

Word spread of The Healers’ Chapel. Not only did those with illnesses, their loved ones, and the healthcare providers come to this extraordinary space to pray but people also just walked in from the streets. The number of people was unimaginable, and no matter how different the people were in their worship styles or appearances, they were all there for the same reason – to heal. They prayed for those struggling with illnesses and injuries, and in addition, they were there to mend harsh feelings lingering in their own hearts. Those praying wanted to ask for wholeness and forgiveness.

There were times people came to release the souls of those who needed to depart and go home. People were there to pray for those they loved, for themselves, for those they had never known before but with whom they now shared the chapel, and for something more – yes, for the troubled, fearful world. The father, mother, and daughter were often among the faithful who came to pray in the chapel. Day and night, one prayer after another was lifted up.

It was a new experience for most to pray for others who were not part of their familial circle, but the prayer circles never ceased. Differences melted. The power of the prayers not only enriched the lives of all associated with the hospital but also started spilling over into the tired, angry city. Many said they could feel the grace washing over the rough asphalt and concrete, bringing a new sense of harmony and life-giving relationships for a beloved community.

“We share a history together and now we share prayers,” said the people. “We will be able to change lives and our beloved community. We will speak the language of life.”

When those praying or sharing in The Healers’ Chapel would pick up stones and skip them across the surface of the stream, the stones would drop and disappear in the water. The impact would set off a succession of gentle ripples, with circles expanding outward. This image came to symbolize the far-reaching impact of the exceptional healing center and its chapel, which became known far and wide as where the leading causes of life were revealed to all those who entered.

The grand oak tree roots beneath the sacred space continued to provide a remarkable strength and foundation. The prayers of the people created and sustained amazing unity, hope, light, healing – and life – blessed life.

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