

Wednesday after the Fifth Sunday in Lent, March 29, 2023

Recommended readings: p. 380, "August 6, 1965," pp. 381-382, "Quotidian," pp. 388-394, "Healthcare"

In chapter eleven, Jeneen Interlandi describes the work of the National Medical Association (NMA), a "pioneering organization of Black doctors" formed because the American Medical Association (AMA) "allowed Black doctors to be excluded, medical schools barred Black students, and most hospitals and health clinics segregated Black patients.... By the 1950s, after a decades-long debate, [NMA] members were pushing aggressively for a federal health-insurance program that would serve all citizens equally—a fight that put them in direct open conflict with their colleagues at the AMA. The AMA was vehemently opposed to nationalized healthcare. Its members had already defeated two such proposals in the late 1930s and '40s, with a vitriolic campaign whose slogans still reverberate today: they called the idea socialist and un-American and warned of government intervention in the doctor-patient relationship. In the early 1960s, when proponents of a national health plan introduced Medicare...the NMA delivered a counter-message of its own: healthcare was a basic human right, inextricably bound to racial equality.... Together, Medicare and Medicaid...secured reliable healthcare for whole swaths of the population—namely, low-income and elderly Americans—for the first time. As has happened so often in our history, Black struggles for equality resulted in greater rights for all Americans. In its fight to secure healthcare for Black Americans, the NMA helped to dramatically improve access for citizens across the racial and socioeconomic spectrum."

And wherever [Jesus] went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed. (Mark 6:56)

The biblical word for salvation also describes healing and wholeness. Jesus leans into life. He restores body, mind, and spirit. He orients us away from the ways that we exclude others, watch them suffer, and deny them care. He steers us away from a past of fear and alienation towards a future of abundant living and beloved community. In his simple summary, Mark reports that Jesus heals everyone in the marketplaces of the local towns and villages. There are no preconditions for him to touch the ill. So, people bring their sick to him. In public. In the marketplace. Everyone. Everywhere. The picture of a just society could not be any clearer. Yet this month, when pandemic protocols expire, some 1.75 million Floridians will lose healthcare because Florida is one of the handful of states not to extend Medicaid to everyone who is impoverished. Although disproportionately Black and Latino, most of them are white.

Prayer

Gracious Redeemer, turn us around and open the eyes of our hearts to see that you want to touch everyone with healing, wholeness, and salvation in the marketplaces of our world. Amen.