

**I** heard that one of the notable residents of Palo Alto had received the liver transplant two months ago. I remember how the media reported of his gaunt look. Steve Jobs, the CEO of Apple Computers, explained it then as the hormonal imbalance. I did not buy it, but it was not the look of diet and exercise, either. It turned out that he had a liver cancer of the advanced stage, which is terminal without exception. I thought, if you had money, it would help you live longer. Then I read a newspaper article that cast a different light.

The article said that there was no illegality or preferential treatment given to Jobs, because he was a wealthy and important client. The hospital in Tennessee, away from the populous urban Bay Area—therefore with the shorter waiting list—that performed the transplant had determined who receives the transplant based on the severity of the illness, and Jobs qualified that criterion. But there were other factors that favored the

wealthy, which the article illuminated.

**B**ecause the recipient must be present at the hospital within 8 hours of the notification of the availability of the organ, it would be nice to have an apartment near the hospital—or to have \$3000 to \$5000 in your pocket for the charter flight. Unless you are able to afford the transportation to get your sick body within that short window of time to the hospital, even if you qualified for the transplant, the organ will be given to the next patient in line who is capable of such financial prowess.

Although the selection procedure is deemed blind to the status or wealth of the patient, and the only criterion is how sick the patient is, the whole process is structured in favor of those who can afford to mobilize their financial resources on short notice. If you cannot find the money to charter the plane, or drive there in that short window of time, you cannot receive the transplant. In other words, if you

are not financially liquid enough, that is *your* fault, and you should die. No matter how fair the process might appear to be, if people cannot meet that threshold of minimum financial liquidity, they are excluded from the pool of those who are given the chance to the new life.

**S**uch is quite a departure from the stories we hear from the Gospels. Jesus was much sought after by those who have suffered from illnesses, and Jesus allowed himself to be available to anyone, regardless of status or wealth of the patient. Not only people came to him to be healed, but he also visited the sick to heal them.

Our story focuses on two female persons. One was the daughter of the head of the synagogue, Jairus. She was at the brink of death. Jairus was a man of influence in the given geographic area. The other was a woman who approached Jesus on his way to Jairus' home. The woman suffered from hemorrhage for 12 years, and spent all her possessions on

doctors who failed to heal her, but made her illness worse.

If anyone cannot feel what it was like, just imagine going in and out of hospital for 12 years, while you are getting progressively worse, and selling all you have to pay off the hospital bill—there was no medical insurance, apparently. Then imagine on top of that that you were forbidden by law from interacting with family, friends, and others in the normal social setting, because your disease was contagious. No one could touch you, hug you, or even touch what you had touched.

**T**he law determined that the unclean one continue in the days of her impurity (Lev. 15:25-30). What this means is that she was cut off from the normal human, social interaction. You are sick, but you are forbidden from getting the help you need from those who are well. You are doomed.

Jesus was her last resort, and that explains why she had to hide the

fact that she was unclean from the crowd. She was actually breaking the law, simply by being present in the crowd. The crowd was pushing and shoving, and there was no way of not touching her.

**W**hen the woman touched Jesus' cloak, he realized that the power had gone out of him, and stopped to find out who touched him—not because of pushing and shoving, but because of touching him with the *intent* to be made well. Having been exposed of her little secret, with fear and trembling she admitted to touching. Instead of rebuking her, Jesus called her, "daughter."

By calling her "daughter," Jesus not only restored her body, but also healed her of the emotional and psychological scars of having been excluded from the normal participation in the human society. By calling her "daughter," Jesus not only restored her as a fully *human* being in the human society, but also her status as a child in the

assembly of God, as a member of God's family.

Then I was thinking, what if Jesus preferred to deal with people of influence and wealth, and bend his ears to those who had more money and influential friends in the high places? What if Jesus rarely stopped for the beggars, poor widows, lepers, or tax collectors, but gladly courted the kings, princes, and high priests, and other wealthy merchants? What if Jesus did not care for those who, otherwise, had no means to get help?

**O**nce I sat down with an old lady who was a friend of a church member. The member wanted me to visit her, in hopes of inviting her to the church. I had a pleasant conversation with her. One thing that remains in my mind was that she was adamantly opposed to the Universal Health Care. Her reason was simple: 1) she did not want to foot the bill with her tax money; 2) she wanted to make sure she had the doctor she wanted. She just did not want her money to go to

someone she did not know, and she did not want to be stuck with a less competent doctor than her money could buy.

Universal health care is not only a theological issue, but also a moral issue. As Christians, how do we justify deaths and sufferings of others solely based on not having enough money? Entertain this question: who *deserves* healing?

**T**he way things are going nowadays, only those who have wealth and influence seem to deserve the best health care. Any effort to extend the health care to those who could not afford it seems to face the insurmountable obstacles. The rhetoric that controls the debate on health care is money: health care is too costly, and we cannot afford to cover everybody.

That is a fallacy. The wealthy never had any money problem with health care. Money for the health care became a problem, only when we tried to extend the same health care to those who are

not wealthy or influential enough. Did Jesus ever ask those who came to him, "How much money do you have?"

That we cannot afford the health care for every one, because we do not have enough money is a fallacy, because we somehow managed to dig up hundreds of billions dollars to finance the war that was criminal to start. We structured our financial and corporate systems, so that those who run the companies could get away with draining the company by freely awarding themselves with enormous compensation packages. We have money to bail out those companies that could not make ends meet, whose board is stacked with these greedy and incompetent corporate executives who are making themselves wealthy by bilking the investors. No wonder, we do not have money for the universal health care for the average Joe, the working stiff.

I am not an expert on these issues, but I can say that there is money for health care. Those who are in

the power do not want the poor and powerless to be covered with the money they plan to keep in their pockets. And the selfish ones believe they can save money by not supporting the universal health care. How does that compare with the way Jesus handled the health care needs of every one, from the dirt poor to the dirty rich?

**J**esus received any one who came to him, and that principle is the core of the universal health care: no matter how pretty or ugly, no matter how well-known or unknown, no matter how poor or rich one may be, a human being deserves a quality health care. And that is the way Jesus handled the situation.

What we do not have is the willingness to share our resources and the compassion for the poor and the less fortunate. We do not have the money for the universal health care, because we are flint-hearted and selfish. How can God bless America, when America is not willing to take care of its poor, the sick, and

the needy, but willing to pour hundreds of billions of dollars into war that was unnecessary? Yet we pray to God and expect God's healing, when we are not willing to allow the poor and the needy the quality health care we take for granted for ourselves. Such flint-heartedness will block the free flow of the Holy Spirit in our fellowship with Jesus.

**I**magine Jesus walking around us today. This is what he would ask: "Why are you not using the modern technology, equipment, and the facilities that you have to heal people? Why would you allow only those who have money to be well? If you have the power to heal people through prayers, why aren't you visiting the sick in the hospital and laying your hands on them and healing them? Why do they have to come to your church? I don't understand you guys!"

Then one of the smart ones would tell him: "Don't you know things cost money?" Indeed. We do not have money for the health care, but do for plenty of

other causes that destroy life and its abundance.

**U**niversal health care is not only a theological issue, but also a moral issue. What place in life does the universal health care occupy in the broad context of the faith life of the modern believers?

Our age has seen such a great leap of technological advancement. We are able to detect and cure many illnesses that people of Jesus' time couldn't. What they could only depend on fasting and praying for healing, we could today with a few simple dosages of medicine or a surgery. We are living the age of medical miracles, comparatively speaking.

So this is how the faith in the new, technologically advanced age might be understood: we believe in the God who renews our minds, so that we might share what we have with those who are poor, sick, and needy.

We do not believe in God who randomly operates to heal only the privileged, random few. As our Jesus has assured the woman, "Daughter, your faith has healed you," we believe that any one with the *intent* to be healed may receive God's gift of healing.

**B**ecause we believe in such a God, we are committed to keep the gift of healing a gift of God, rather than keep it as a commercial product designed for profit, a commercial product to enrich the privileged few.

This is what the faith means for the modern Christians: confessing that Jesus is my Lord and Savior, and believing that God is love, means that we have committed to become the participants of God's healing power not only by our fasting and prayers, but also by sharing what we have and utilizing all our modern technological resources for every one.

The universal health care is but one inadequate expression of such faith.