

## No Time for Haste

"I don't have time to be in a hurry." – John Wesley

Okay, I've also seen it attributed to Thoreau but I'm too busy to look it up. And that, according to Dennis McCullough, is just the problem – at least, if I was an elderly parent, a doctor or a dutiful child.

McCullough, a physician, has written a book called *My Mother, Your Mother: Embracing "Slow Medicine," the Compassionate Approach to Caring for Your Aging Loved Ones*. Essentially he advocates the counter-intuitive program of telling doctors to care treat elderly patients by doing less to them and more for them. Give less medication and in lower doses; run fewer tests and perform more hands-on examinations; scope and scan less, touch and talk more.

This treatment places demands on adult children as well as professional physicians. McCullough wants offspring to diagnose their parents' condition by, of all things, listening! "No one," he opines, "can be a bigger expert on a parent's voice than a former teenager trained in the same household." The radar that once told you when you were in trouble can now tell you when your mother is.

It reminds me of the story told by Dr. Beach Conger, a big-city big shot who purchased a rural practice in Dumster, Vermont. He replaced Doc Franklin, a venerable backwoods practitioner. One day a patient tottered in with a complaint about arthritis and offered Conger her corkscrewed hands. "I took them," Conger confesses, "the way I might a surgical instrument, inspected them, and gave them back."

The patient shoved her mitts at him again. "Looking don't do 'em any good," she explained. "Holding is what they want." At the end of the rather awkward session the old woman offered a final lesson: "If you want to doctor in Dumster you gotta learn to hold. That was Doc Franklin's way."

And Jesus' way. For God so loved the world he didn't write a prescription in an illegible scrawl; he showed up in unmistakable skin. He didn't push miracle pills of formulaic salvation; he invited us into his life. When religious experts diagnosed with antiseptic scans of Scripture, Jesus listened for the sin-sickness in the quavering cries of the voices around him.

He fouled his flesh with the oozing epidermis of lepers and endured the pawing of hemorrhaging women. He came in contact with corpses and reversed ritual impurity by infecting death with life. In the end he opened up his nail-gnarled hands on the hard wood of the cross and died in a posture of eternal embrace. A good paraphrase of Hebrews 5.8 might be, "He learned to hold. That was Doc Jesus' way."

In a day of ministry by maelstrom when forty-day fixes prescribe one-book-fits-all healing and church growth experts hustle the snake oil of salvation by organization, Doc Jesus dares advocate the luxurious pace of slow medicine. Hold a few hands this week, hear a few hearts: it may be just what the Doctor ordered.

Hands On,  
Doug