

## **Sermon, Peel Cathedral, 16<sup>th</sup> October 2022 – St Luke + Healing**

**Readings:** Acts 16: 6-12a; Luke 10: 1-9

### **Search for wholeness**

Today we are remembering Luke, the author of the Gospel and of the book of Acts. In the Bible he is referred to as a physician and has been adopted as the patron saint of doctors. You will have seen in the Link that a little later in the service there will be an opportunity for anointing for healing. And yet as you listened to our two readings, you may have been surprised to see that there was little mention either of Luke or of healing.

You may remember that a couple of weeks ago I encouraged us to think about our points of view, and how it was unlikely that any one of us would have the opportunity to see any situation from every perspective. So you'll be relieved to learn that I have no intention of setting out THE Christian perspective on healing. Many books have been written on the subject.

In his Gospel Luke provides many examples of people who were healed. And you'll remember last week how Nigel spoke about the Samaritan leper who came back to thank Jesus when he realised that he'd been cured.

One question that arises in the Gospels is about whether disability or illness is related to sin. On one occasion (John 9:2) Jesus was asked whether the condition of a man who was born blind was due to his sin, or that of his parents. And Jesus is clear that it had nothing to do with sin. But on another occasion there did seem to be a link.

You may remember the paralysed man whose friends let him down through the roof to where Jesus was. Jesus told the man that his sins were forgiven (5:20). Jesus was aware of the outrage of the Pharisees who said that only God could forgive sins. So, to demonstrate his ability to forgive, he said to the man "Get up, take your mat and go home." And he did just that, walking out of the room, praising God. He had been forgiven and he had been healed.

I remember some 50 years ago a local Anglican priest talking to our youth group and saying that in his experience some people who suffered from arthritis had found relief through forgiving people who had hurt them, or through forgiving themselves. He talked about the stress caused by lack of forgiveness leading to chemical changes in the body resulting in arthritis. And many researchers since have drawn links between social stress, coping and forgiveness. I'm not saying that all pain is a result of sin or lack of forgiveness, but I'm raising the question for you to think about. It is not easy to really forgive someone, particularly if they think they've done nothing wrong, or don't care. But we are called to forgive. Every time we say the Lord's Prayer we ask for forgiveness in the context of our being willing and able to forgive others.

Several times Luke mentions crowds of people coming to listen to Jesus and to be healed. On one occasion (4:40) Jesus laid his hands on each one and healed them. In another place (6:19) Luke tells us that the people all tried to touch him because power was coming from him and healing them all. And you'll remember the lady who had been haemorrhaging for 12 years who was cured simply by touching the edge of Jesus' cloak (8:44).

It's not surprising that Jesus needs to get away from the crowds, to pray and recharge his batteries. But even then sometimes the people follow, disrupt that quiet time and want to be taught and healed (9:10/11).

In our society today, we have many ailments. Just this week Manx Care drew attention to the mental health needs of our children, with one in ten children needing support. And I suspect most of us know of people who are waiting for treatment or operations. Indeed some of us are waiting.

We are very fortunate to have many medical procedures and drugs available to us to ease our conditions. But how does this fit in with the idea of Spiritual healing?

Our Gospel tells us that 72 people were sent out to go ahead of Jesus to the places where he was to visit. They were given various instructions about what to take with them, how to find accommodation and their expected behaviour. And what was their mission? To heal the sick and tell them that the Kingdom of God is near.

In the early Church healing was seen as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It was acknowledged that not every Christian had the gift but James encourages people to confess their sins to each other and pray for each other so that they may be healed. He said "The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective." (James 5:16)

So how can we respond to the need for healing today? I'm pragmatic and would suggest that the GP is a good place to start, with a request for a referral to a specialist if necessary.

But what role does prayer have in healing? Research has been carried out in America which suggests that when patients undergo similar procedures, those that have been prayed for by name – even by people who don't know them – heal more quickly. That should encourage us to pray!

And what of direct prayer today for healing?

If you search the internet you will find examples of immediate cures for a variety of ailments following prayer. I believe that God does still heal miraculously today. But it isn't the norm in our society, or even within Christian society.

What does it mean to be healed? I've been asked to pray for Pamela who is being cared for in a nursing home. She is an elderly woman and it is expected that she will die soon. So how should I pray? I can pray that she doesn't experience pain. I can pray for her family and friends as they visit, sharing these last days with her. But should I pray for her healing? If my faith is strong enough, would God give a positive answer?

But maybe I'm asking the wrong questions. Perhaps, instead, I should be praying for wholeness.

Josh Grover suggests that the "whole" person is able to integrate both the good and bad as part of reality. Each moment is good even though we may experience pain and brokenness in the moment. A "whole" person will have pain, will struggle and will have broken relationships. Wholeness is not dependent upon our circumstances. A "whole" person is able to find comfort within the discomfort of life.

As we approach the end of our lives, perhaps it is in death itself that we become whole – leaving behind our problematic bodies, and receiving new ones as we meet God face to face.

Meantime, there is a harvest to gather! Apparently there are 900 vacancies here on the Island with only 200 people looking for jobs. In the UK millions of pounds worth of fruit and vegetables have been left to rot, partly because there aren't enough workers to harvest them. There's nothing like bringing in crops. Digging up and eating potatoes that you've grown, picking apples from the tree, eating fresh produce from garden or allotment. Luke encourages us to ask the Lord of the harvest to send out workers into his harvest field. As well as making that our prayer, could we venture out to pick an apple or two ourselves – to find ways to share our faith with those we meet?

In a few moments we have the opportunity of sharing bread and wine – of remembering the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our Lord. And when we have received, we can ask for healing, for wholeness, for ourselves or others, and Nigel will anoint us. My prayer is that each of us will receive the gift of wholeness, will recognise that our body, mind and spirit are in harmony and, in realising that, discover the ability to find comfort within the discomfort of life.

Amen.

Rosemary Clarke

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