

Healing - It's true and it's unbelievable

A Sermon for the Twelfth Sunday after Trinity

[based on Fourteenth Sunday after Trinity 2012]

Collect:

ALMIGHTY and everlasting God, who art always more ready to hear than we to pray, and art wont to give more than either we desire or deserve; Pour down upon us the abundance of thy mercy; forgiving us those things whereof our conscience is afraid, and giving us those good things which we are not worthy to ask, but through the merits and mediation of Jesus Christ, thy Son, our Lord.

Epistle;

2 Corinthians 3: 4-9

⁴ Such is the confidence that we have through Christ towards God.

⁵ Not that we are competent of ourselves to claim anything as coming from us; our competence is from God,

⁶ who has made us competent to be ministers of a new covenant, not of letter but of spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

⁷ Now if the ministry of death, chiselled in letters on stone tablets, came in glory so that the people of Israel could not gaze at Moses' face because of the glory of his face, a glory now set aside,

⁸ how much more will the ministry of the Spirit come in glory?

⁹ For if there was glory in the ministry of condemnation, much more does the ministry of justification abound in glory!

Gospel;

*Hear the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ as written in the 10th
Chapter of St Luke beginning at the 23rd verse ...*

Glory to you O Lord

Mark 7: 24-end

- ²⁴ From there he set out and went away to the region of Tyre. He entered a house and did not want anyone to know he was there. Yet he could not escape notice,
- ²⁵ but a woman whose little daughter had an unclean spirit immediately heard about him, and she came and bowed down at his feet.
- ²⁶ Now the woman was a Gentile, of Syrophenician origin. She begged him to cast the demon out of her daughter.
- ²⁷ He said to her, 'Let the children be fed first, for it is not fair to take the children's food and throw it to the dogs.'
- ²⁸ But she answered him, 'Sir,* even the dogs under the table eat the children's crumbs.'
- ²⁹ Then he said to her, 'For saying that, you may go—the demon has left your daughter.'
- ³⁰ So she went home, found the child lying on the bed, and the demon gone.
- ³¹ Then he returned from the region of Tyre, and went by way of Sidon towards the Sea of Galilee, in the region of the Decapolis.
- ³² They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him.
- ³³ He took him aside in private, away from the crowd, and put his fingers into his ears, and he spat and touched his tongue.
- ³⁴ Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', [Ef-a-tha] that is, 'Be opened.'

³⁵And immediately his ears were opened, his tongue was released, and he spoke plainly.

³⁶Then Jesus^{*} ordered them to tell no one; but the more he ordered them, the more zealously they proclaimed it.

³⁷They were astounded beyond measure, saying, 'He has done everything well; he even makes the deaf to hear and the mute to speak.'

.This is the gospel of our Lord

Prayer:

³⁴Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said to him, 'Ephphatha', [Ef-a-tha] that is, 'Be opened.

Lord Jesus, open your Word to our hearts and our hearts to your Word

In the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. *Amen*

Introduction;

Many [many] years before Jesus laid his healing hand on the deaf man
a great prophet had this to say about
a world healed
and a world transformed; [Isaiah 52:7]

[he said];

*"How beautiful on the mountains
are the feet of the herald,*

*the bringer of good news
[for] the whole world from end to end
shall see the deliverance wrought by our God.*

*What good news?
What deliverance?
Nothing less than the healing of mankind. “*

***.... now that’s some God inspired
forward thinking [if ever there was]***

*and down through the centuries
many others [including John the Baptist]
shared this prophecy and “**prepared the way**”.
for the “**deliverance wrought by God**”*

When Jesus finally arrived to take on his ministry
he made clear
[as is the way of many an inspirational leader or teacher]

[he made clear]

.... **what** was going to happen
.... and **how** it was going to happen
.... and **why** it had to happen

When Jesus took to his feet in the temple
he found the place where it was written

in the scroll from Isaiah:

He said;

*The spirit of the Lord is upon me
because he has anointed me;*

*he has sent me to announce good news to the poor,
to proclaim release for the prisoners
and recovery of sight for the blind;
to let the broken victims go free,
to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour [Luke 4: 18f,
Isaiah 61:1f]*

.... "this was his promise"

.... this was the centrepiece of his manifesto:

the **"Physician of the Soul"**

had arrived to administer

the **"Wholesome Medicine"** of the gospel
[as is says in the Prayer Book collect]

.... or to put it another way

this is nothing less than

"the healing of mankind"

Move:

All told *[in the Gospels]* –

we have something like forty stories where Jesus heals.

And if you analyse them

it's to discover that *[with very few exceptions]*

those who are healed are the poor

the voice less

the marginalised

and those who are despised within society.

Jesus rejects *[totally rejects]*

any notion that sickness is the result of sin.

.... His healing goes way beyond

physical change *[in one who is sick]*

.... In almost every case the person who is healed

[the person he embraced]

is socially

or politically

or religiously disadvantaged

[.... and if you want to know what that means on the streets today

then you might like to join with us [in a couple of weeks]

and hear it first-hand from some of the West End Refugees]

Jesus heals the unloved -

those who are largely unnoticed by the majority of those
around them;

the leper

the mad

the blind

and the lame

the adulterous and immoral

and those of other faiths.

Zacchaeus *[for example]*

is demonised by a hostile crowd because of an unfair tax
and Jesus restores to him his place within the community
and his relationship with his neighbours;

others are forgiven even before they confess their sin.

Jesus recognises the complex nature of each person -

the way their minds and bodies and spirit inter-relate –

Jesus says to the paralysed man let down through the roof by
his friends

“Your sins are forgiven”

even before he says

“take up your bed and walk”

.... knowing that the peace of mind
[which forgiveness brings]
is an inseparable part of healing.

It was Martin Luther who wrote that
*"Christ's proper work is to declare the grace of God,
to console and to enliven."*

Jesus never explained sickness:
he simply affirmed
[in the way he lived his life and the way he met his death]
that God is to be trusted.

So the Gospel healings are above all
actions which tell of the love of God
for the forsaken and seemingly damned
especially those who are excluded on religious or
moral grounds.

Jesus confounded all accepted religious protocol by pledging;

not only can we never earn that forgiveness
[which is God's free and gracious gift]

but sinners seem assured of forgiveness before
they ask for it or express penitence

.... look no further than the parable of the Prodigal Son
where the father watches and waits
and then runs to embrace his returning child;

or the story of the woman at Simon's house who anoints Jesus' feet.

It's as if the Gospels are saying
that you can only truly confess in response to
the grace of God's forgiveness
which is all of a piece with
the great affirmation of the New Testament that

"we love because

*[we love because]
God first loves us first."*

That faith and that trust which
are so central to our healing
are our answer to God revealing his true nature in Jesus
Christ.

Revealing himself in a life from which
from first to last
defines God's ***love and forgiveness***,
showing them to be;

.... the most powerful forces in the world

Shift;

So then *[so then]* by touching and embracing
the afflicted and the outcast
Jesus is doing something radically new.

He's challenging the crowds and the onlookers

to consider their implicit or explicit role
in that persons suffering.

And he's affirming those he encounters
with the assurance of God's forgiveness.

But there is one **more** dimension to his healing acts.

For in some strange sense
Jesus actually takes on the suffering and the affliction
of those he cures

.... it becomes part of him.

.... by dining with Zacchaeus,
.... by consorting with sinners ,
.... by inviting women of ill repute into his company,
he **risks** being misunderstood,
and ostracised.

It's as if [*in his compassion*]
in his compassion he takes on their brokenness,
until eventually on the cross

.... Jesus is himself broken, ostracised and abused.

And this, [*we claim*]
this crucified figure with words of forgiveness on his lips
and his love unbroken
is the most accurate picture of God the world has ever seen.

Finally;

I started [this morning]

by sharing some haunting words first spoken by Isaiah something like
3,000 years ago;

and I would like to close by sharing
some memorable 21st century words
from award-winning

[and inspirational] journalist Melanie Reid

*[You might know that she writes for the Times “Spinal Column”
and it largely features her perspective on life
through the eyes of a tetraplegic]*

and in many ways she has the outward *[physical]* appearance
of those who Jesus healed

Melanie Reid wrote these words precisely two years ago *[to the day]*
[in the closing week of the Paralympics;]

*“Thick and fast they have come
the moments [and the success]
when you shake your head and say
did I just see that?
Was that for real?*

*The drama of 80,000 people falling silent
so that a blind long-jumper
can sprint into her darkness
towards the sound of someone clapping*

*The sight of a young woman –
her body frantic with cerebral palsy
achieving serenity on the back of a horse.*

*The potency of men with no legs
turned into gods by the menace of their running blades*

*I don't know what I expected
.... but suddenly it's cool to be disabled ..."*

.... and the sight that did it for me
is as clear now
as it was on that same day two years ago

Richard Whitehead, is a double leg amputee
and on Super Saturday 80,000 spectators
[no the whole nation]
jumped to their feet
as Richard **stormed** to victory in the T42 200 metres
it was a stunning – blistering - magnificent performance
[.... I get chocked just thinking about it now]

And then I discovered that
Richard has a tattoo on his forearm that reads,

"Cometh the hour, cometh the man".

Rarely has body art seemed more prophetic.

.... 2,000 years ago it was the Syrophoenician woman's hour

she knew as a foreigner [*and a woman at that*]

she knew she had no claim on his help;

.... he knew it,

.... she knew it.

Yet she came nonetheless
not because she deserved anything from him

.... but because she understood both what
he had to give
and that
he would be ready to give.

and the whole the point here:
Jesus is saying to the crowds,

"Look at this woman. She understands who I am even if you don't

*She knows I'll respond
not because of worth on her part,
but because of who and what I am"*

It's a message we need to learn in turn.

None of us has any claim on Christ's goodness
or any right to demand his love,

but ***whatever the hour***

.... whatever the hour

.... he is ready to hear our prayer and meet our innermost needs

³⁴*Then looking up to heaven, he sighed and said
'Ephphatha', [Ef-a-tha] that is, 'Be opened.'*

**At the heart of all healing
is our reconciling – affirming God
whose name is Father
and whose nature is love**

Amen