

Sermon :

Christ our healer. Mark 5. 21-43

30th June 2024

I do not like being ill or sick, and I cannot think of anyone who would disagree. Some would say that sickness is a result of wrong behavior or our actions. The truth is, sickness is part of our humanity. We don't have to look very far to come to the conclusion that even our environment is suffering. Pandemics, plagues, new viruses and climate changes, remind us of our own fragility. Sickness cuts us off from the rest of society. It makes us feel useless and depressed, whilst coping with excruciating pain. Feelings of anxiety, powerlessness, abandonment, and vulnerability often accompany us.

A penitent David, describes his feelings as he shares his suffering with the Lord, pleading for healing. "There is no soundness in my flesh, no health in my bones. My iniquities weigh heavily upon me. My wounds hurt, my loins are burning. I am utterly crushed and groan with the tumult in my throbbing heart. My pain is ever before me, my strength fails me and the light of my eyes has gone. Everyone stands aloof from me."

Pain, isolation and exclusion are part of David's experience, as he becomes aware of his sinfulness and need of healing. He entreats God not to forsake him, but to help him, "hastily" as his suffering has become intolerable. (Ps.38)

At last he has to acknowledge that the Lord is the only one who can restore him to health and wholeness. God hears his plea and comes to his aid, assuring him that he would be sustained during his illness and would be healed. He is filled with gratitude and thanksgiving. (Ps.30)

God had compassion for his people from the very beginning. It is his covenant character of love and faithfulness to care for them. In Exodus, he promised the Israelites that none of the diseases which the Egyptians experienced, would come upon them if they would listen to his voice and be obedient. (Ex15:26)

Early in His ministry, Jesus healed people of all sorts of diseases known to humankind, the sick, infirm, blind, dumb, etc. and even raised the dead. Sometimes it was ALL who were sick in the crowds that followed him as he taught about the Kingdom of God. There are about 25 accounts of healing individuals in the New Testament.

These instances of healing emphasized the reality of what the Kingdom of God is like in the present time. By his teaching, preaching and healing Jesus was demonstrating the power and the life of living in the Kingdom of God. Emmanuel....God with us, with visible signs and wonders. (Matt 4:23-25).

The future fulfillment of the Kingdom of God with Christ, is described in the final book of Revelations revealing the total healing that awaits every true believer. "The home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God: they will be his people and God himself will be with them; He will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more, mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away." (Rev.21:3-4.)

2.

When Jesus read from the book of Isaiah in the synagogue, he was making public the reason for his existence. It was his job description.

"The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to preach Good News to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord". (Luke 4: 18-20. Is.61: 1-2)

The healing stories give us insight into Jesus's compassion, the faith of those willing to ask or reach out, and the results of such actions. (Mk. 5:21- 43)

Jesus had just crossed to the other side of the sea, to be surrounded by a great crowd of people who had obviously heard about him.

Jairus, a respected leader of the community and one of the rulers of the synagogue, seeing him, fell at his feet. A desperate father, began pleading urgently for the life of his dying, beloved 12yr old daughter, beseeching him to "Come and lay hands on her so that she may be made well and live".

Jesus walked with him. He was accompanying him on his journey. Compassion.

The crowd became a throng, possibly people jostling for a closer encounter with the Healer or wanting to see what Jesus would do next.

There was a woman in the crowd who had suffered serious hemorrhages. She had endured this for 12yrs, spent all her money on physicians only to get worse. She would have been completely excluded from the community, as she was ritually unclean as well as poor. She would have desperately tried not to be identified, as others would have been defiled by her uncleanness and she may have been treated much the same as a leper. She should not have been there.

She (the nameless one) had heard about Jesus and said, "If I touch even his garments I shall be made well". This she did and immediately Jesus knew that someone had touched him, as he felt power leave him. He enquired, "Who touched my garment?" and looked about, searching for whoever had done this. He wanted to identify and make contact with the receiver of his compassion.

The woman had felt in her body that she had been healed and came in fear and trembling to Jesus, fell at his feet and told the whole truth. Her presence in the crowd had been revealed. Such an act of bravery! Jesus response to her was full of compassion as he said "Daughter, your faith has made you well, go in peace and be healed of your disease."

He publicly confirmed her healing.

In one sentence Jesus had restored her into his Kingdom as his "daughter", no longer excluded as an outcast but a full participant of the community. Sick people were required by law to report to the Priest who would confirm their healing and make offerings on their behalf. Jesus fulfilled this role as her priest. What a beautiful act on her behalf in full sight of the community. (Lev.15:25-30)

Meanwhile Jairus has received the worst possible news that his daughter had died. I wonder how he would have felt. Sad, disappointed! Did he need more patience or was his faith being tested? Did he have knowledge of this woman who had interrupted Jesus and the mission to his house? Jesus' words "Do not fear, only believe" must have helped him through this difficult time. Words of peace spoken to still the turmoil.

This did not deter Jesus's mission, as he continued to Jairus' house, dispatched the mourners and with only the parents and his disciples, Peter, James and John, took the child's hand and spoke the words of life to her, "little girl, arise". He always addressed the individual as well as their need. (Is.43.1-3)

Every healing, every miracle that took place, was an opportunity to bring home an important truth, that God through Jesus had triumphed over sickness and death and sealed it at the cross where He was stripped, bruised, beaten, crushed and suffered an agonizing death on our behalf. Perhaps we can remember this as we partake the Eucharist. (Is.53.4-5)

At the end of the book of Mark, we have what is called the Great commission to "Go into all the world and preach the Gospel (good news) to every nation...One of the signs that will accompany those that believe in my name, is that hands will be laid on the sick and they will recover. (Mark 16): The Book of Acts is full of the action of the Holy Spirit in the lives of the Apostles, continuing the forgiving, compassionate, saving grace of God to any person humble enough to admit their need like the woman who had no one else to turn to, or go to for help.

This is our commission also. God is still at work! Healing the sick, broken hearted, blind, spiritually blind and deaf, imprisoned, captives to worldly philosophies etc. How can this be! People like us do not heal others? Read Luke 10.1-12 where Jesus sent the 70 to cure disease and proclaim that the Kingdom of God was near. It is not us, but God working through a willing vessel. If the Holy Spirit of God dwells within us, all things are possible. (2Cor.4v7)

Every Eucharist we say "His Spirit is with us. The Lord be with you, send us out in the power of your Spirit, to live and work to your praise and glory." If we truly believe these statements we can be assured that God will send people into our lives who need to hear or experience this message of healing, physical, emotional and spiritual. ALL in the name of Christ.

Almost EVERYONE, that we meet during our daily routine, benefits from us living as a part of the Kingdom of God, loving, serving, and doing his will by reaching out, helping and healing the world around us. This is making Christ visible.

As by the wounds of Christ, we have been healed, so it is the weaknesses, vulnerabilities, griefs and sorrows that we experience which enable us to come close to others and minister to them. Successful Christian ministry which follows in the steps of its founder is born, not from skill, power or knowledge, but from God and then offered to others." (Pattison comments on A .Campbell, Nouwen)