

Talk on Sunday 12th July 2020: Healing from God

Texts: Revelation 22:1-6; Matthew 9:1-8

This Sunday was due to be the end of our Festival of Art – Art as a way to well-being. We were going to be looking at many different ways to well-being. I thought that thinking about this would be especially relevant to us now. It's been tough in lockdown. I know many of you have suffered and may still be suffering – limited social contact, maybe physical pain and being unable to get treatment, mental pain – anxiety – about how the world and we as individuals will cope with this pandemic. Finding a way to well-being might be something that will help you.

I use that term 'well-being' purposefully because this emphasises the all-encompassing nature of God's healing touch. Healing from God is not just about the medical healing that we were celebrating last week. It's about a complete transformation of humanity. Brian alluded to it at the end of his talk last week when he said that we may not be doctors or nurses – but we all can work together to heal society. We've all been given the free gift of care and love and compassion for those less fortunate than ourselves. We can heal relationships and we can heal our community – it's all in our hands as followers of the greatest healer – Jesus Christ. Christ is our healer and today I want to look at how we can benefit from this healing.

In our gospel reading we see Jesus, the greatest healer, helping the paralysed man. But before he physically heals him, he tells the man (in verse 2) 'your sins are forgiven'. Why does he do this before bringing about the physical healing? I think it's something to do with wanting to make sure that the physical healing will hit the right spot. He's interested in the whole person and recognises that healing has to be spiritual as well as physical. Even today, when you're physically ill, it's often the mental and spiritual side that's more debilitating than the physical side. Yes, there might be pain or discomfort, but the questioning of "Why me?" or "What have I done to deserve this?" and "will life ever be the same?" can intensify this pain and can make it difficult to move on from this place, even after a physical recovery.

In Jesus' day there was a belief that any physical illness resulted from a sin, either your own sin, or that of your parents, or even grand-parents. In saying that the man's sins were forgiven, Jesus is recognising that the

paralysed man needs to be set free, not only from the physical pain, but also from his mental and spiritual pain. Jesus wants us all to be free of whatever it is that binds us (or what we might term burdens) as he says in Matthew 11:28: 'Come to me all who that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest'. This is not about rest from hard physical work, but about coping with the trials that life lays upon us.

I wonder what it is that binds you ... is it physical pain; is it mental pain; is it a relationship pain – a friendship that's just not right; is it a political pain - knowing that something in our church, or our local or national community isn't right; is it an emotional pain – maybe through having been let down by someone. God can heal all these pains, through Christ, because his healing is a holistic, spiritual healing, which helps us to cope with pain of any sort better.

Many of our pains or burdens spring from being parted from God in some way and this reflects the biblical source of pain – original sin as it is sometimes called. In the story of the Garden of Eden we hear how humans were first parted from God. The Garden of Eden was a place of peace and abundance, but when Adam and Eve disobeyed God by eating from the Tree of Life, they were banished from this peace and abundance and had to work the ground to gain food, meaning they were in a place of scarcity, where relationships were in jeopardy – it was every man and woman for themselves from this moment on.

The bible goes on throughout the Old Testament to tell of how humans continued to live in this place of scarcity, where there was constant conflict between different peoples. There were all sorts of rules and rituals that had to be followed if you wanted to be brought back into a relationship with God – that place of peace and abundance.

When Jesus came into the world, he brought the opportunity for people to come back together with God through the cross: the Tree of Salvation. No longer is it necessary to follow those rules and rituals to be in relationship with God. Through Jesus we now have a way of being reminded that God forgives any sin any time when we've been parted from him. We come and say sorry to God for being in a place of conflict, or only seeing scarcity and thinking of ourselves instead of others, and we make that commitment to do better and to find peace and abundance in the future.

God created a perfect world of peace and abundance at creation. In Jesus he's given us the opportunity of renewal today to live in that kind of world – something which we call the kingdom of God and which Jesus taught so much about. And he's also given us a promise of further renewal at the end of time. In our reading from Revelation, we're given a vision of a place where there's another tree of life. This tree of life is a promise of complete restoration – what's called the healing of the nations in verse 2. This is not just for those who recognise their partition from God and make changes in their life, but for anyone who wants to be a part of that place of peace and abundance.

The important thing to remember about this picture of the future in Revelation is that this new earth that's promised is not something that's brand new. It's not that the old earth is thrown away. No, it's about that same earth being recreated, being made new. The kingdom of God is all about healing our world today through Jesus.

It's through Jesus that we can live in a better way. We can live in our current world better by turning away from seeing only scarcity, and therefore being in competition with others so that you can get the best, and turning instead towards being in harmony with the earth, being at peace with your neighbour and being reconciled with God, through the cross.

I wonder how you see the world: in your household, in our church, in our country. Is the world a disposable resource, a place of scarcity, or is it a place that can be made new through Christ's healing power being brought to bear, so as to create places where there's a mindset of abundance and peace – places where everyone is welcome and everyone wants to belong.

It's a slow work, but it's God's work. This picture of God's kingdom is the kind of thing that I was talking about in the recent vision meetings. These will be summarised in an article in the magazines next month and I'd like everyone watching this video to join with me in bringing it to fruition. Rather than returning to that place of looking out for ourselves, let's bring God's healing touch to our lives and our community so that we can see glimpses of God's kingdom here in West Wickham. Amen

Prayer Pointers

As churches gradually return to gathered worship together may we not lose the opportunity to see beyond the walls of our buildings. May we have a renewed sense of vision and mission to engage with our community more closely. We give thanks for all those who have worked to maintain online worship and pastoral care in our benefice. We thank God for the inspiration and energy of the Holy Spirit at this time.

We continue to give thanks for all who dedicate their lives to physical, mental and spiritual healing. We pray that our two churches of St Mary and St Francis may be seen as beacons for healing and wholeness in our community.

Continue to pray for governments across the world as difficult decisions have to be made to deal with the Covid19 pandemic. May all their decisions be wise and for the good of all.

Continue to pray for all those who have lost their jobs as more businesses in the past week have closed or entered administration. Especially we pray for those who will lose their jobs through major redundancies at Croydon Council – for those with families to support and who are going to find it difficult to cope without employment. May they not lose hope and may they be supported to find new jobs.

For all those who are still shielding because of Covid19 restrictions, especially those who worship with us and who are concerned about returning to services in church. May we all reach out to them and let them know that they are loved and cared for.