Sunday 22nd May 2022

Prepared by Dr. Liz Cope

*Healing & Hope*

**Call to Worship:** (Paraphrase of Psalm 67)

We come today gathered or at home and bring praise to you , O God. We sing for joy. Let the whole world sing for joy, for you are sovereign and govern with justice and guide all the nations of the world. May the nations praise you, O God. Yes, may all the nations praise you. AMEN

**Hymn: STF 175 Light of the world** *Tim Hughes © Thank You Music* *https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXg2ztge8f0*

 1 Light of the world,
 You stepped down into darkness,
 opened my eyes, let me see
 beauty that made this heart adore You,
 hope of a life spent with You.
 *So here I am to worship,*
 *here I am to bow down,*
 *here I am to say that You're my God;*
 *and You're altogether lovely,*
 *altogether worthy,*
 *altogether wonderful to me.*

2 King of all days,
 oh so highly exalted,
 glorious in heaven above.
 Humbly You came
 to the earth You created,
 all for love's sake became poor.
 *Refrain*

And I'll never know how much it cost
 To see my sin upon that cross.
 *Refrain*

**Introduction:**

Aldersgate Sunday is when we remember the moment John Wesley felt his heart “strangely warmed”. Wesley was an ordained Anglican priest, but was disillusioned and felt unable to reach his congregations. He had, reluctantly decided to attend the Moravian Chapel on Aldersagte Street, and it was whilst he was listening to the reading of Martin Luther’s Preface to Paul’s letter to the Romans, that he experienced a personal encounter with God such that he suddenly felt “I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and assurance was given to me that He had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death”.

Prior to this John Wesley had been “going through the motions”. He knew God in his head, but now he truly knew God in his heart, and trusted in his salvation. Both of our bible readings today are concerned with healing and wholeness. John Wesley on that day in 1738 was suddenly aware of his own personal healing and wholeness.

**Reading:** John 5:1-9

**Sermon Pt 1**: *Do you want to be healed?*

Imagine being flat on your back, unable to walk for 38 years and then being told to “get up, pick up your mat and walk!” But that is exactly what this man did – at once he was cured, picked up his mat and walked. I would imagine, at the least he would be a bit stiff, a bit wobbly on his legs, yet he was able to immediately pick up his mat and walk away. Such was the faith of this man. As simple as that! If he didn’t realise it, Jesus did. The man didn’t need help, he didn’t need to be brought to the pool. Prior to this the man had made excuses – “I have no-one to help me”.

The story was that the pool would at times bubble up, perhaps from some subterranean source, and it was at this time that the first person to enter the pool was healed. There were time constraints and a limit to the number of people who could be healed. This man had lost all hope of ever being healed, after 38 years! However Jesus, simply asked, “do you want to get well?” That might seem a silly question, but this man was used to this way of life, laying beside the pool. If he was made well, he would no longer be able to rely on the support of others for food or money. What would happen to him now?

I’m not suggesting, for one moment, that those who have a long term illness do not long for a cure – but sometimes we can become so used to one way of living that another, supposedly “better” way of living seems scary, out of our comfort zone. In our faith, I wonder, do we sometimes prefer to stay as we are, and avoid any change, especially if it requires effort on our own part?

Jesus says to the man, “if you want to be healed, you need to get yourself up, you need to pick your own mat up, and then you will be able to walk away.”

It is important to point out, Jesus is not saying, “pull yourself together.” Rather, he is saying that nothing is impossible. No matter how long, how serious, how hopeless, there is the possibility of change.

The other factor in this reading, which is expanded on if you read the following verses, is that Jesus did all this on the Sabbath. “Work” was forbidden on the Sabbath under Jewish law. What I hadn’t realised until I read this passage again, was that the Jewish leaders didn’t object to the man being healed, but to the fact that he was carrying his mat on the Sabbath! Crazy – carrying your mat, because you no longer needed to lay on it!

Jesus, an observant Jew himself, after all he had come to Jerusalem for one of the festivals, was not limited to when he could heal someone. Our NHS would be in an even worse situation if all the staff down tools on a Sunday!

Jesus, does not limit on when someone can change. It can be any day of the week. Jesus doesn’t require the help of other people, or rituals and rules – no stirring up of special waters, no reliance on others.

Jesus requires a deep desire and determination on our own part to bring about our own inner healing and a new and possibly scary way of life.

* *Do you want to be changed?*
* *What excuses do you make?*
* *Are you prepared for change no matter how hopeless you think your situation is?*

**Prayer of confession**

Merciful Father, forgive us for the times when we have preferred to continue as we are, rather than taking up the challenge you set us. Forgive us when we fail to see those who need our help, or when we fail to take up those opportunities to share our faith with others. Forgive us when we see nothing but failure and hopelessness, instead of putting our trust in you whatever our situation. Help us to stand up, take up our mat and walk, in the assurance that through you our sins are forgiven and we can be made whole. ***AMEN*

Reading**: Revelation 21:10, 21:22-22:5

**Sermon Pt 2:** *Living with hope*

One of the very difficult questions when thinking about healing is, what about those people who have great faith, yet do not receive physical healing? I don’t profess to have the answer to that question, but this reading from Revelation might help out thoughts.

In these verses from Revelation, John paints a picture of Jerusalem with no temple, with never fading light, with a crystal-clear river running through the centre and the tree of life on both sides of the water. For the Jews, the temple was the most important building in Jerusalem. It was a precious, essential and sacred place to come closer to God.

Remember the Samaritan woman that Jesus encountered at the well. She asked Jesus, where was the most important place to worship God – in the temple as the Jews did or on the side of Mount Gerazim as the Samaritans did?

The answer, in Revelation, is that Jesus and God are the temple. There will be no need for a building, no obstacles to drawing close to God. Jesus will be with us, close to us at all times and for all time.

One thing that is true about light, is that darkness can never overcome light, darkness cannot exist in the light. When you switch a lightbulb on the darkness is immediately extinguished. Darkness represents those things that are bad, sin and evil. There will be no sin, no evil, no impurity, and no suffering.

There will be no need for outside light, for God is the source of all light that will never be extinguished, and that light represents all that is pure, all that is good and all that is true. Just as switching a light on exposes whatever it shines on, so the truth exposes whatever exists.

We sometimes worry about things that seem at the time vastly important, but when God shines His light on them, they are then put into perspective. However, also, there may be some things we think are permissible or we can get away with, but when exposed by God’s light, they are seen to be dangerous.

As with many of the passages in scripture, this all comes with a warning. In verses 25-27 we are told that not all will be let in, only those whose name is written in Book of Life will be permitted to enter. How does one’s name get written in that book you might ask? That is not for us to know, however it is not by our good deeds, it’s not by who we are or who our parents were, rather it is about believing and trusting in what Jesus did for us through his sacrificial giving of his life for ours.

We can therefore live with the hope that one day we will be closer to God, with no limits in time and space, in a time and place where there is no sin, no pain, and no suffering or illness.

John Wesley, on that day in 1738, suddenly became aware of what Jesus had done for him, and devoted the rest of his life, more than 50 years to bringing that message of hope to the people he met.

**Prayers of Intercession**:

We take a moment to pray for others and for ourselves.

Gracious God, you call us to take up our mat and walk. We pray for those who are suffering at this time, in so many different ways.

We pray for the soldiers in the Azvostal steelworks, Mariupol and the population of Ukraine. We pray for change, for water and food for those men, for the seemingly impossible breakthrough in the war.

We pray for people we know who suffer with long term illness, with frail and ageing bodies. Soothe their pain and suffering.

We pray for ourselves, that our faith will be strengthened through encounters with you, and that we will come to know you as our eternal Saviour. AMEN

**Hymn**: STF 545 Be thou my vision *Irish, c 8th century trans. by Mary E Byrne https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ihJAJA4ibEs*

Be thou my vision, O Lord of my heart,
be all else but naught to me, save that thou art;
be thou my best thought in the day and the night,
both waking and sleeping, thy presence my light.

Be thou my wisdom, be thou my true word,
be thou ever with me, and I with thee, Lord;
be thou my great Father, thy child let me be;
be thou in me dwelling, and I one with thee.

Be thou my breastplate, my sword for the fight
be thou my whole armour, be thou my true might;
be thou my soul's shelter, be thou my strong tower:
O raise thou me heavenward, great Power of my power.

Riches I heed not, nor earth's empty praise:
be thou mine inheritance now and always;
be thou and thou only the first in my heart:
O Sovereign of heaven, my treasure thou art.

High King of heaven, thou heaven's bright sun,
O grant me its joys after victory is won;
great heart of my own heart, whatever befall,
still be thou my vision, O Ruler of all.

**Blessing**: (from Psalm 67)

May God be gracious to us and make his face shine on us. God, our God, blesses us. May God bless us still. Amen.

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