Healing – Encountering God

What do we understand by the term healing? In recent years we have increasingly recognised the interconnected nature of our beings as humans. We know that the mind, emotions and body are intricately related to one another and effect one another. This past year has reinforced the effect of restricted social activity upon general wellbeing. The growth in practices like mindfulness and meditation has also highlighted that the spiritual aspect of our lives also impacts the whole of our personal wellbeing.

Healing miracles were a strong component of Jesus ministry. Over the years this has been explained in a variety of ways. They were signs of the breaking in of the kingdom of God into this world through the life, death, resurrection and ascension of Jesus. They were convincing proof of the activity of God enabling the early Christian movement to gain credibility in its world, and bringing to birth strong Christian faith communities. They were signs of the activity of the Holy Spirit.

I would not dispute any of these statements, however at times they can distract us from recognising that the gospels regularly state that Jesus was “moved with compassion” and healed people. We encounter this in the healing of the person with leprosy in this text.[[1]](#footnote-1) In Greek the term is *“splanchnizomai”* meaning to yearn with compassion,[[2]](#footnote-2) it bears with it the concept of a “gut wrenching” feeling, sometimes translated “bowels of yearning”. It is a powerful feeling, demanding attention and prompting action. So this powerful experience of compassion prompted Jesus to act and bring healing to various people.

In seeing God as the source of life, we can see all forms of healing as having divine input, whether by medical means or more miraculous means, or various combinations of both.

Healing is an activity of God’s extravagant love and grace. Healing shows God’s love in practical action. It is completely undeserved and comes about purely because of the love of the One who offers it.

The obvious elephant in the room here is, What about people who are not healed? Even the passage we looked at today speaks of the people bringing **all** who were sick to Jesus, and ends with saying he healed **many** who were sick. Jesus himself did not cure all illness in his ministry. There are no easy answers to the question of suffering in our world. In the midst of this painful mystery however we can affirm with Paul that “that neither death, nor life, …nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

There is sometimes hesitancy regarding praying for the healing of others amongst Christians. This seems to be strongly motivated by a fear regarding dealing with the possibility that they may not be healed. I wonder if this indicates a somewhat limited view of personhood, with an incredibly strong focus on the physical dimensions of the person. Stories abound of people encountering God in a time of illness and being blessed by this encounter, though not necessarily being healed of their illness, but they may be healed in other areas. I believe our understandings of healing need to embrace our growing understandings of personhood. They need to include the physical, emotional, mental, social and spiritual aspects of our human personhood.

It seems to me that Jesus demonstrated this throughout His ministry. His capacity to meet people and interact at the point of their need, whether it was obvious or not, was such a strong characteristic of His ministry. For some the interaction was in the form of a conversation, for some it was the offer of healing, for some it was in the form of liberating them from an “evil spirit”, to others it was offering loving acceptance to those who were ostracised, for others it was in challenging them to a completely new way of life.

The passage which we read from Mark’s gospel was in the context of Jesus having just finished teaching in the synagogue. So his actions grew out of this teaching opportunity. Likewise when he suggests that they move on to other places, he speaks of preaching there also. He engages in preaching once more and then is caught up again in healing people. Jesus words and actions were solidly integrated. Our words and our actions can be used also to bring healing to others, and to point others to Jesus.

Our Psalm today reminded us of God’s practical care for the broken hearted, the outcasts and the down-trodden. In the epistle for this week Paul reminds us that “To the Jews I became as a Jew, in order to win Jews…To those outside the law I became as one outside the law ….To the weak I became weak… I have become all things to all people that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the gospel, so that I may share in its blessings.”

Both passages point us to meeting people where they are, to engaging meaningfully with others, listening attentively so that by words and actions we may express the love and care of God for them as individuals with their unique needs and circumstances.

As I was preparing I was reminded of two people from years gone by who encountered God in very different ways. One was a patient of mine who had experienced a constant life-threatening battle to recover from what should have been simple surgery. His wife was a Christian and in the midst of his illness he encountered God personally and was deeply changed, subsequently he entered a very rapid uncomplicated healing process. The other was also a man with a Christian wife who gradually became friendly with her church friends. Over a long period of time he became more open to attend church activities and at one such activity he had a powerful and life changing encounter with God.

The diversity of people we encounter from day to day present many opportunities for us by words and actions to demonstrate what God is like. There are so many pathways that people may take which can lead to encountering God in a new way. We have the privilege of journeying with some of them, and perhaps helping them to encounter the God we love and serve.

1. Mark 1:41 NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Vines 218 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Rom 8:38a, 39b NRSV [↑](#footnote-ref-3)