

Healing

Readings : Isaiah 40: 21-31 Mark 1: 29-39

Introduction

It was the Sabbath, just as it is today. Jesus had been to the synagogue to worship just as we are here to worship today. He'd caused a bit of controversy at the synagogue because while he was there, he had spoken to an evil spirit and commanded it to come out of a man, and it had. Everyone there was astonished at what had happened, and the gossip machine got into action and spread the news like wildfire.

At Simon and Andrew's home

Our gospel reading today records more of what happened on the same day. Jesus and two of his friends leave the synagogue and go off for lunch. Apparently they'd been invited to Simon and Andrew's home. When they get there, they learn that Simon's mother-in-law is ill with a fever. Having a fever doesn't sound very serious to us—just flu perhaps? But we're talking about a pre-penicillin world here, where people often died either from the fever, or the infection that caused it.

Simon's mother-in-law would have been feeling not only sick, but embarrassed, anxious, and inhospitable. She is the senior woman of the household, and it is a matter of honour for her to supervise the preparation of a meal for guests, and to serve it to them. But she can't. She's sick.

Jesus is told about her illness, and goes to her. He takes her hand, helps her up, and then...the fever, and any resulting after effects, are gone. According to first century standards, she can now resume her place of seniority in the household, and serve her guests. Her healing has restored her physically, socially and emotionally.

Even before lunch, Jesus has healed two people—the demonised man, and Simon's mother-in-law.

After sunset happenings

I expect that Jesus enjoyed his lunch and had a relaxed afternoon with his friends. But, after sunset, the crowds begin to arrive. They have waited until the Sabbath is officially over because they know that carrying or moving sick people on that day is against the Jewish law. So too, is healing on the Sabbath.

But sunset marks the beginning of a new day. People begin flocking towards the door of the house, and soon a big crowd has gathered. We are told that Jesus healed many people from all sorts of illnesses, and drove out many demons.

How did Jesus heal?—touch

How were they healed? We don't know the details of those in the crowd. But we do know about Simon's mother-in-law. Jesus **touch**ed her. He took her hand and helped her to get up. I'm sure his touch was gentle and helpful, but it was unorthodox. Touching someone who was sick was socially offensive. Even worse, in the culture of the day, men did not touch women, unless they were family members.

Jesus, however, often touched people who needed healing. He **touch**ed the eyes of two blind men (Matt 9:27-31) and they received their sight. He took Jairus's daughter **by the hand** and she was healed. (Matt 9:25) You may recall that when Jesus was arrested, one of his followers cut off the ear of the high priest's servant, but Jesus **touch**ed the man's ear and it was healed. (Luke 22:50) Jesus even **touch**ed a man with leprosy, making himself ritually unclean, but the leper was healed. (Matt 8:3)

How else did Jesus heal?—speaking

How else did Jesus heal? Often he simply **spoke** to the sick person who was healed. Think of the man with the shrivelled hand to whom Jesus simply **said**, "Stretch out your hand." The man did so, and his hand became normal. (Matt 12:13)

What about blind Bartimaeus sitting begging by the roadside. He told Jesus he wanted to see, and Jesus **replied**, "Go; your faith has healed you." Immediately Bartimaeus could see. (Mk 10:51-52)

And do you recall the man at the pool of Siloam? He'd been an invalid for 38 years, but when Jesus **told** him to "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk" he did, and his invalid days were gone. (Jn 5:8)

In these three examples, Jesus spoke kindly but firmly. Those with the disabilities could choose whether to do what he said, or not. But where demons were concerned Jesus showed His authority. Often, as in our reading today, he refused to let the demons speak. He "**rebuked**" the demon that was causing a young boy to have seizures (Matt 17:18) and he **commanded** evil spirits to come out of the man who was living among the tombs and self-mutilating. (Mk 5:8)

How did Jesus heal?—other ways

There were many other ways that Jesus brought healing to people. There are two examples of Jesus taking people away from the crowds before he healed them. The deaf and mute man is one of them. When they'd left the people behind, Jesus put his fingers in the man's ears, spat, and touched his tongue. Then he said, "Be opened" and the man could hear and speak. (Mk 7:32-35)

Another time, Jesus met a man who had been blind from birth. He made a mix of his saliva and mud, put it on the man's eyes, and then commanded him to go and wash

in the pool of Siloam. Having washed himself, and no doubt his eyes, the man could see. (Jn 9:6-7)

Sometimes Jesus didn't even need to be at the same place as the sick person. A royal official to Him when he was in Cana in Galilee, and begged him to travel to Capernaum to heal his son. Jesus refused to go with him, saying simply, "You may go. Your son will live." (Jn 46-53). Next day, the official's servants confirmed that the son's return to health coincided with the time that Jesus had spoken those words.

Similarly, a centurion asked Jesus to come and heal his pain-wracked and paralysed servant. That servant was healed right at the moment when Jesus said to the centurion, "Go! It will be done just as you believed it would." (Matt 8:5-13)

Doesn't that encourage you to pray for others who have a need wherever they might be in the world? We don't have to be there. We can ask God to heal, and know He is at work. I've had a great example of that just this week. On Thursday a lovely older woman, living in a retirement village, requested healing prayer from our Prayer Chain. She'd had diarrhoea for 10 days, and understandably wanted to be well. I have no idea how many people prayed for her, or how often they prayed. But yesterday morning, she reported, "You must have raised up a storm in the heavens, because today I am completely well and restored in energy." Isn't God good?

My healing

I didn't know that Jesus was there in 1986, Christian Advance Ministries Summer School, 1000 people.

Usual miserable dose of hayfever—blocked/running nose, itchy eyes and mouth, rashes.

At breakfast met woman with similar symptoms, awful rash. Offered her my prescribed cream. "Won't see you again".

"If I see you, you will be meant to have the cream." Start of morning session, who was first person I saw? Gave her cream. Didn't see her again. My hayfever cleared up quite quickly as expected. Have never had it again!

Another healing

Woman known since 2001. Six years later —breast cancer. Surgery, and severe lymphodema, i.e. fluid swells arm because lymph glands removed. Later cancer spread, so in hospital bed in retirement complex. Took her Communion but didn't want me to pray for healing for months. Eventually asked for prayer, Sept 2012. Anointed with oil.

Heat from hand in to head felt by me. She felt heat in arm. Never had lymphodema again.

Same woman, Jan 4th 2013, asked for prayer for lump in leg. Bigger than a table tennis ball. Anointed with oil. Lump shrank immediately.

Died later that year—cancer not healed, but some symptoms from it were. Life more comfortable as a result.

The secret to healing

What was it, what is it, that causes all these healings to happen? Our answer is found both in the last verses of the gospel reading, and in our Old Testament reading. The gospel tells us that early in the morning, even before it was light, Jesus went off alone to pray. He wanted to be free from distractions, to talk to His Father God, and listen to His directions. Just like us when we are involved in the ministry of healing, Jesus had to be willing to allow the Holy Spirit to guide and direct Him. I'm sure that at times, just like us, Jesus felt a little foolish. I know that I would be saying, "Um, excuse me Lord, but did you really say to mix some of my saliva with a bit of dirt, and put it on this man's eyes? You did? Okay. Here goes. I hope I've got it right."

But I don't think that Jesus had those doubts. He knew His calling was to preach, to teach and to heal, and He knew where to gain strength for His mission. He would have known off by heart those last wonderful words from our Isaiah reading:

"They that **wait** upon the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary, and they will walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:30-31)

Jesus would also have known the words from the beginning of today's passage:

"Do you not know? Have you not heard? The Lord is the everlasting God, the Creator of the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 40:28)

So if God is our Creator—if He created you and me—then surely He knows our bodies, our minds and our emotions better than anyone. It follows that He knows how to heal us, and no two healings are exactly the same. The symptoms may be the same, but the cause, and therefore the way God chooses to heal each person, will be different.

As I read Isaiah, I hear God saying "Don't you understand?" I haven't changed. I'm still in control of the earth. Have you forgotten that? You can't fix this situation, but look to me **for hope**, and for **me to bring my solution**. Exchange your weakness for my strength. Put like that, any problem we have doesn't seem quite so big and insurmountable, **if** we are in touch with the Lord.

Our responsibility

Do you **wait** on the Lord?

Do you, like Jesus, withdraw from the hustle and bustle of life to have your calling and your energy renewed by God?

Do you spend time talking to Him, and more importantly, do you give Him space to speak to you?

And do you take notice when He flashes an idea or a ministry task across your mind? Do you **ignore** it because you are **too busy**, or do you **stop** and **change direction** to allow God's purpose to be achieved through you—a purpose that will bring out the best in you?

Conclusion

After His hectic Sabbath, Jesus checked His direction with His Father, replenished His energy through prayer and moved on with His God-given ministry. Whatever **our** ministry is, we must do the same.

The ministry of Jesus was to restore, to save, and to show people how much God loved them. It's just the same for us. And if we need encouragement on the way, just remember the words of Screwtape, famously penned by C.S. Lewis:

“God wants us to learn to walk, and if only the will to walk is really there, God is pleased, even with the stumbles.”