

Readings: James 5:13-16; Luke 9:1-6; Matthew 28:16-20

Isn't the Holy Spirit amazing?

New life

Born again

making us sons and daughters of God, brothers and sisters of one another and of Jesus

the go-between God who enables us to live like Jesus in holiness – walking in step with the spirit showing the fruit of the spirit in our lives: Lovejoy peace patience kindness goodness faithfulness gentleness self-control...

And also enables us to live like Jesus in serving

the Spirit who gives us specific gifts, or graces, to each one of us and to us as the whole church – and You remember we have been learning that it is the same Holy Spirit who anoints us who anointed Jesus and so we share the same mission.

And what is that mission?

Remember Jesus at the synagogue in Nazareth in Luke chapter 4 when he unrolls Isaiah scroll:

*the Spirit of the Lord is on me because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour.*

Yes!                      What an amazing mission!

Where everyone knows the grace of God, his freedom, justice, healing and wholeness, where everything is as it is meant to be, as God wants it to be.

Jesus describes his mission in terms of bringing in the kingdom of God, or the kingdom of heaven . And the concept of the kingdom of God is right at the heart of Jesus's teaching.

But it's not just a physical place or territory or kingdom.

Jesus describes it as a new dimension to our understanding of reality itself.

It's a spiritual thing, not least because Jesus also teaches us that there is a kingdom of darkness, where sin and devil reign. Indeed to some extent sickness and death are seen to be the result of the arrival of sin at the Fall, and evil –though there is more to it than that!

But it can be somewhere you can be, something you can see: as Jesus explains to Nicodemus in John 3: you cannot enter the kingdom of God or see the kingdom of God unless you are born again by water and the spirit.

Jesus also tells us that the kingdom can be within you (Lk 17:21)

It's the special place where everyone lives in ways the King wants us to live in.

and Jesus teaching about the kingdom of God is closely linked to his healing miracles. Matthew 4:23 *Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom, and healing every disease and sickness among the people.*

But the concept of the kingdom of God is a bit confusing. Sometimes Jesus says that it has arrived, sometimes he explains it is still to come.

It's as if Jesus' coming, his death and resurrection was the decisive event in history which marked the beginning of God's Kingdom coming.

But that the kingdom of God will only fully be here when Jesus returns and the creation somehow is renewed in a new heaven and a new earth:

St John foresees it in his revelation: It will be a place where:

*“God will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.”*

But we are not there yet.

The kingdom is now and not yet.

Jesus secured victory over sin and death, but the spiritual battle continues until his return again. In the meantime w- in the power of the Holy Spirit, we are to work towards building God’s kingdom here on earth as Jesus did.

We pray for that every day! In the Lord’s prayer your kingdom come, your will be done on earth as it is in heaven.

And praying for healing is a key part of bringing that kingdom in.

Just as Jesus went about healing bodies – and spirits and people’s lives as signs of the coming of the kingdom of God, so now when any one is healed of any thing, this is also a sign of God’s kingdom breaking in now, a sign of where Jesus is present. Through our prayers and through all of the wonderful healing work that goes on through our doctors and nurses and modern medicines.

So what about us praying for healing?

What do you think we need healing for?

What should we be praying for?

*Talk to your neighbour and will share a few thoughts together...*

Healing from pain, selfishness, bitterness, materialism, abuse, addiction, sin, injustice, oppression, whole communities, the Earth and environment

there is a lot that isn’t **whole** isn’t there, there’s a lot that isn’t as God wants it to be?

But we can start by praying for a person who is unwell.

We’ve heard already how Jesus sent out the 12 with authority and power to preach the kingdom of God and to heal the sick (Luke chapter 9) in Luke chapter 10 he sends out a further 72: v 9 *“heal the sick who are there and tell them, “the kingdom of God is near you.”*

And at the end of Matthew’s Gospel *“go and make disciples of all nations, baptising them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.”*

We pray for healing because Jesus tells us to.

Acts of the Apostles is full of the early church doing just that.

James in his letter tells us one way of to go about it.

Saint Paul adds a further nuance to this by describing how the Holy Spirit seems to work through particular people at particular times with gifts of healing

and through history the church has been amazed to see God at work in answering those prayers in particularly special ways – though as I have said, he also answers our prayers through modern medicine too. But here are a few rapid snapshots from my own experience.

In about 1998 Sarah a friend of Ruth’s had arthritic hands that were immediately restored with prayer. A few weeks later she discovered she was having headaches and went to the opticians to check her glasses only to discover that she did not need her glasses any more because her eyesight had been healed at the same time.

In around 2000 , a college colleague had broken his collarbone and had the x-ray to prove it only to find that about one week later it was completely healed.

In Zambia in 2010 there were several people healed as a result of the Ministry of the team that was with me.

Paul Barton told me about a lady who came to visit him who needed a knee replacement but who also asked him to pray for her in his consulting room. He did so and never heard any more from the lady until a few years later when she returned. How can I help you? When you prayed for my first knee I did not need the operation because it was healed now I'd like you to pray for my other knee.

Only a few months ago here we prayed with the man who had a strange lump in his throat that he was due to have scans and possibly surgery on. Before the scan was due they discovered that the lumps had all disappeared.

It's wonderful – God is still healing people following our prayers and also through the amazing kingdom work of modern medicine.

But you will all know the elephant in the room; which is that not everyone we pray for is healed... Why not?

1 we don't know. The concept of the kingdom coming now but not yet can help. But the most important thing to realise is that what happens when we pray is not up to us. God is sovereign. We are not. Jesus suffered. Saint Paul suffered. Somehow, some times, God's purpose appears to be fulfilled with our suffering and we simply do not understand it.

Sometimes our disappointment in praying in the past can make us reluctant to keep stepping out in faith to pray again and perhaps because we fear that we will look foolish. A great teacher about healing, and gifted in healing, Jack dear, says "if you don't take the credit, you don't take the blame". we are simply called upon to pray and to leave the rest up to God.

2 Are people not healed because we don't have enough faith? When we looked through the Bible there is usually a degree of faith there somewhere – but it's not always in the person who is being prayed for – for example the paralytic man lowered through the roof or the centurions servant. Which means that if we are not healed it is not necessarily because we do not have sufficient faith.

3 Do people not get healed because we have done something wrong?

Jesus makes it clear that illness and accident are not usually because of something we have done wrong. But there can be some blockages to being healed: sometimes a lack of forgiveness or other things we are deliberately doing that we know are wrong. This shouldn't surprise us – the wholeness that God seeks for us is a wholeness of body mind and spirit. Our relationships with God and with one another are important as well.

4 Jesus teaches us that Sometimes we have to keep praying and persist in praying for things and we know that sometimes healing is a gradual process.

5 And finally it's important to realise that death for a Christian, however awful it is for us, as right now with dear Joan, is the place of their ultimate healing.

So to conclude:

Healing is an enormous subject. There are complex theological ideas. We are to avoid the extremes of unfaithful pessimism or a *presumptuousness optimism that thinks that if we've got the formula right than the miraculous must always happen.*

It's like reading a very complicated menu in a restaurant. The important thing is we not distracted by the menu. but we simply enjoy the meal.

We pray for healing because

1 that's what we are here to do. It is part of Jesus' work to restore people to health, as signs of the kingdom of God coming in. Remember it's not just about physical healing. And it is also about relationships with God and with one another

2 we pray for healing because we share God's compassion that we feel for anyone who is suffering just as we know Jesus does.. it shouldn't surprise us: it's in God's nature: He tells his people in Exodus: I am the God who heals you

3 we pray for healing because we are simply obeying what our Lord told us to do.

And we pray expectantly – like my Gazanea plant – open to the work of the holy spirit healing work through you and your prayer into someone's life.

We pray using all the relevant gifts of the spirit that he might have given us – gifts of healing and also gifts of faith or discernment or words of knowledge or prophecy.

Jesus often laid hands on the person he was praying for: and sometimes we anoint people with oil as James was instructing us.

But there is no one method, at its heart,  
we are called upon to step out in obedience and pray  
with the compassionate heart of God.  
with faith in his goodness and power  
to pray Lord your kingdom come, your will be done.  
To praise him and rejoice with him as it does.