

Sermon Sunday 17th February 2013

Reading: Luke 8 verses 40 - 56

Healing and Wholeness

Are we ready and brave enough to reach out to God to receive spiritual healing and a wholeness with God?

Luke was a Greek, a Gentile, not a Jew, and a Doctor so he brings to his writings here and in the Book of Acts a different perspective to the other Gospel writers. He describes illness and diagnosis using his medical background but more importantly as a non Jew he displays a sensitivity to outsiders, like himself, who Jesus came into contact with, especially women. Women were second class citizens in the Jewish culture and treated accordingly with very few rights the men had. But Luke explains how Jesus crossed that boundary of culture and especially the gentle care he showed for women. He treated them as equals with equal respect which did not go down with the Jews of that day and probably with some men today - but I'm not going there as I could get into a lot of trouble!

In the reading from Luke it starts with Jarius an important man in the synagogue begging Jesus to heal his daughter; a brave step for such a man and Jesus set out for his house to do so. Why because Jarius had faith in Jesus to heal his daughter but Jarius the important man and his daughter were put on hold because Jesus dealt with an ordinary woman with a problem demonstrating His ministry for all not just the important as the Jewish religion and culture of the time did.

In itself the story of the woman is a very moving and a very personal story. In Jewish Law she would have been regarded as unclean as would have all menstruating women; the Book of Leviticus goes into great detail about this and what a menstruating woman should do and in some Jewish sects still do. But this woman had a permanent medical problem she had been bleeding for twelve years. In Mark's account of this woman he writes in Chapter 5 Verse 26 'She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse.' So as well as being a second class citizen as a woman she would have been regarded, as I said earlier, as unclean by all Jews and anyone touching her would themselves be unclean, she would not have even been allowed to worship in the synagogue because they believed her illness was a sin which kept her away from God. She had tried her best trying to find a cure but to no avail. I cannot imagine how she felt, ill, excluded by all Jews and not allowed to worship. An outcast which I sincerely hope and pray we would not do today to any such person or any person our society or people consider undesirable or different.

She had tried to do her best to find a cure to overcome this but had failed. How often do you try to do your best? I know I try to do my best in all the situations I have faced and will face in the future but just as importantly I also know I am not perfect – yes I know that's a shock to some of you, a joke honestly. When doing my best I never made a great thing about it or boasted about it. All I knew was that I was trying to please God and doing what He wanted me to do, quietly and without fuss.

But back to the woman; her answer to her problems appeared in Jesus. She never asked for a cure like Jarius; was she too ashamed of her condition – who knows but she just reached out and touched His cloak and was healed. Many rubbed shoulders with Jesus that day but only the woman came with faith to be healed. Jesus could have just walked on but He did not. He asked who had touched him and the woman fell trembling at His feet. Contrary to Jewish custom Jesus proclaimed to the crowd that this unclean woman had touched Him and she was healed through her faith or belief in Him; look at verse 44 ‘**and immediately her bleeding stopped.**’ Immediately’ not when he said so and not in the future but there and then! Many in that crowd and later crowds heard Jesus but how many actually responded to Him? It’s still the same now and a great sorrow that many hear of Jesus but fail to respond. We can respond and reach out to God through Jesus Christ and receive immediate forgiveness and start a new life in Him. No one is too important or too unimportant to do this and reach out to God; be like the woman, have faith and do it. Personally in times of trouble or distress I have reached out to God. On a practical level when I start to prepare a sermon or service for example I ask in prayer for God to guide me in the meaning and explanation because sometimes I look at a biblical text or theme and think what’s this all about?; it has always been granted. On those occasions and throughout my life He has never let me down but I know I have let Him down on many occasions but He is always there and I only have to reach out to Him and admit this and receive His blessing. I repeat are you prepared to reach out and seek Gods touch or are you too proud or consider yourself too important or just too afraid to ask for help? I would ask you to reach out and touch God as the woman did. In the Communion Service there are some wonderful words we say in every

Communion Service; 'Lord I am not worthy to receive you but only say the word and I shall be healed.' Reach out to the ever present God who is always there even if you feel you are not worthy and be healed; God wants us all to reach out to Him.

{We have witnessed the baptism today of twins..... They have been accepted into God's Church and a new life in Christ by the ritual of washing with water; they are symbolically cleansed to start a new life.}

So, healing and wholeness in its widest meaning can be received into all our lives by reaching out in faith and touching God, as the woman did. Are you prepared to follow the woman's example and be brave enough to reach out to God, believe me by personal experience it will transform your life and your outlook on life.

Let us pray. Heavenly Father, help us all to reach out to you in faith and receive your blessing and life changing way. This I ask in the name of your Son our Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen