

Healing Service 30.4.23 – Acts 2:42-end & John 10:1-10

Today is our healing service, a special time when we draw near to God, to ask him for healing of ourselves, our friends and family, our community, and maybe on your heart today is healing of our world.

And God is in the business of re-creation – of mending the broken. Today we have the opportunity to join in with what He is doing, to seek His will, to experience His resurrection power, through the Holy Spirit at work in and through our lives.

Our readings today show us how, when people really know Jesus, and give their **all** to following him – when we seek Jesus in fellowship and prayer, in the breaking of bread, in praise and worship, God enables **wonders** to be performed, and he added to the numbers being saved.

It has been wonderful and a real privilege to see the little group of confirmation candidates wanting to put down a marker and say Yes to God, to say Yes to Jesus, to be part of His re-creation story now and for the rest of their lives.

Please come along to the service on 21st May and hear the testimonies of these wonderful people. They are truly remarkable. Let's join with them and support them on their journeys. God adding to the numbers being saved.

In our Gospel reading, John speaks of those who **hear and know** Jesus's voice. Jesus is not only to be studied and acknowledged as our saviour – our prayers are not just to be asking for things **from** him – we need to build a **relationship** with Jesus, to be able to listen and know when Jesus is speaking to us, and to respond to **his** voice.

Today, our prayer ministers are here to listen to your requests, but they are also here to listen to Jesus' voice, to listen to the Spirit's prompting, so please expect times of silence during the prayer time, don't fill every moment with words – allow time to listen to Jesus.

And as we do, we may just understand a little bit better about **why** Jesus came.

Yes, he came to save us, he came to forgive us our sins, yes he came to show us the way to the Father, yes he came to bring us peace, praise the Lord –

And, **and...** listen again to John chapter 10 verse 10 – as Jesus says

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

Or as the New Living translation puts it 'My purpose is to give them a rich and satisfying **life**.'

Or the Good News Translation – I have come to give life in all its fullness.

Or how about King James - I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.

Jesus came to bring us a rich, satisfying, full, abundant LIFE – Sounds good – I'll have some of that, thank you. But what does 'Life in all its fullness' really mean?

We often think of life in the biological sense. – thinking about health – having a full life as having a healthy life. Or maybe we think of having a good life is one where all our relationships are going well, our finances are fine, things are going well for us...

And so, if we can think like that...., it is easy to think that, when Jesus said that 'he came that we might have life and have it abundantly', we think that Jesus wants us to be healthy and have our relationships blessed, and all of these kinds of materialistic things that make our lives feel more comfortable. And yes he can – but let's take a closer look at that word **life** in the book of John.

Within his Gospel, the word 'life' (in Greek - Zoe) appears 36 times in 32 different verses, and of those 36, 17 times that same word, Zoe is paired with, what is translated in English as either, eternal or everlasting.

Let's go back a few chapters earlier and see what Jesus said in John chapter 5. John chapter 5, verse 24, Jesus said

Very truly I tell you, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life and will not be judged but has crossed over from death to life.

There that word Zoe, life occurs twice – once on its own and once with eternal... eternal life.

What Jesus is saying is that those who hear the gospel.... that Jesus came into the world to die for sinners, to make a way, to be reconciled to the Father. ... Jesus came so that if we hear the gospel **and believe**, that we will pass out of death into life.

Which kind of means, that what Jesus is describing.... what most people think of as life, Jesus actually calls death. Are you with me? We pass out of death (our old life) into life...

Just like Kerry, Aaron and Charlie did two weeks ago – as they died to their old selves and came out of the water into new life.

Life without Jesus is death.

And Jesus didn't come to give us more abundant death, Jesus didn't come simply to bless all the things that we usually think of, when we think of our life, our interests, our health, our material possessions, our relationships.

But he came that we might come out, of that which Jesus called death, into something else.

It's not that he doesn't care about our interests, our health, our relationships...of course he does, but

In John 10:10, when he says 'I came that they might have life and have it abundantly', he's speaking of some **new quality of life** that doesn't really relate to what we used to know before we heard the gospel.

He's calling us to a new and transformed life.

If we continue reading in John's Gospel, we see in chapter 17 that Jesus himself actually **defines** what this **life** really is.

And he says this... 'this is life, that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent.' This is life.

Jesus defined life not in the abundance of our material possessions, not in the abundance of our relationships with other people in this world, but primarily he defined life as our knowing God, knowing Christ.

And when we look at the purpose of why John wrote his gospel, why he recorded these things in the first place, he tells us very explicitly in chapter 20 ...

‘these have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. And that believing you may have **life** in his name.’

If we run around chasing material possessions trying to accumulate stuff or to accumulate experiences - the Bible describes that as chasing the wind. It's something that is vanity and will always disappoint in the end.

Instead, Jesus came so that we could have something more substantive, more permanent that we could have a relationship with the true and living God, that we could know Jesus Christ and live to follow his way- ...for he is ‘the **way**, the **truth** and the **life**. Amen

There will be some among us here today, that only want Jesus on your own terms. Only want Jesus for what he can **do for you**. In effect, you want Jesus to bring you more death... Now, that may not be, how you see it. It may not be how you think about it... but, if you’re struggling right now – Jesus says come to me, hear my voice. I am the gate. I will keep you safe. I have come to give you life. Jesus came to show us his way, a better way and more fulfilling way, if we would just listen to him and hear Him.

Jesus came to bring us new life **with** him – an abundant, eternal, life, a life full of awe and wonder.

Do you know his awe and wonder even in the midst of difficulties? Do you know his voice, whispering in the babble and noise of this world? As he calls...

Come to me all who are weary and heavy burdened, and I will give you rest – he says in Matthew 11:28

2 Samuel 22:20..He reached down and took hold of me; he drew me out of the pit...he brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me, because he delights in me –

Do you know the delight of your God?

So we have heard **why** he came..

And now to the **how**...how can we find this life, this abundant, rich, satisfying life in all its fullness?

Research done by LICC has shown that there is a very strong link between regular engagement with spiritual practices, and the extent to which people felt like God was actively working in and through them in their everyday lives.

You’ve heard it before...the more you read the bible and pray, the more you spend time in worship and contemplation, the closer you come to knowing that life, that abundant life that Jesus longs for each one of us.

So here we go, 10 top tips for engaging with Jesus – and I urge you to take at least one of these away with you today....Which one are you going to take? - as you continue the journey of finding life in all its fullness.

1. **Spiritual practices are for everyone.** Sometimes we say things like, ‘I’m not that kind of person’, or ‘I could never do that’. Whatever your age, life stage, or occupation, you **can** engage with regularly reading the bible and prayer, and you **will** find them helpful for your life.

2. **Spiritual practices enrich every aspect of your life with Jesus.** Upward (in our relationship with God); inward (within our own hearts and minds) and outward (in our relationship with others and our ability to represent Jesus in our everyday lives through our words and actions). They mustn't become disconnected. Spiritual practices enrich every aspect of our life.
3. **It's helpful doing practices 'on the go', as well as when you 'stop'.** We need time to sit and listen to the voice of Jesus, speaking through the bible, speaking through worship, speaking through prayer but it's good to connect with God as we **go**, as we go about everyday life – in the midst of all the challenges and opportunities we face out in the world. Take them with you.
4. **We can incorporate the stuff of daily life into our practices.** If you're a teacher, you can pray for your class as they line up. If you're on a lot of video calls, you can remind yourself of your Christian identity as you wait to join. If you're in the military, time spent cleaning your sidearm can be a chance to ask God to strengthen you.
5. **Intentions don't make things happen, plans do.** Work out a realistic time and place to read your bible and pray. Maybe it's on the train to work, after you've taken the dog for a walk, **while** you take the dog for a walk, straight after the news, whatever works for you. When is the best time for you? Make a plan.
6. **Experimentation and personalisation are key.** There's no one fits all – but find something that works for you. Is it a bible app on your phone? or some bible reading notes? a special place that you go. What works for you? Try it, if it doesn't work, try something else. Don't give up.
7. **Busyness is not the biggest barrier – chaos is.** In the research LICC found that levels of busyness didn't make a difference, to how well people embedded the practices in their lives; the key was structure. For example, some participants were more likely to read the Bible on the days they went into work, compared to when they were off or working from home. Address the chaos... that's for someone here today...
8. **God's grace matters.** Many people experience background guilt when it comes to spiritual practices. Words like 'failure', 'guilty', and 'should' are often used. Perfectionism is not helpful; a healthy blend of taking the practices seriously and remaining aware of God's grace is important. Try but don't beat yourself up.
9. **Connection with others matters.** Forming new habits isn't easy. Receiving the wisdom, support, and encouragement of others can be the difference between practices becoming embedded in a person's life, or not. Find a friend to journey with. Join a bible study group, form a WhatsApp group with a couple of others.
10. **The Bible matters.** Over and over again, the Bible has shown itself to be disproportionately effective at growing whole-life disciples. especially when people find links between the words they read, and the lives they live. Please my friends, open your bibles, read your bibles. Be it on a device or a physical book.

Pick one...

God is in the re-creation business. The transformation business. Jesus came to bring us life, to bring you life and life in all its fulness. Know his voice. Listen to his voice. For it's his voice that leads to life. And as we seek Jesus in fellowship and prayer, in the breaking of bread, in praise and worship, then God enables **wonders** to be performed, and he added to the numbers being saved. Amen.