

Healing: Magic or Mystery?

First Sunday After Trinity

Matthew 9 v35-10 v 8.

Bishop of Selby

Let me be upfront with you. I don't really get healing. Yet, as the Gospel reading for Sunday in Matthew 9 shows, Jesus was all about preaching the reign of God and healing people so it's part of our story and is why Christians have been committed to praying and working for healing down the centuries. And that's not just about being doctors and nurses. For example in South Africa it was about confronting racism and working for a society in which all have equal dignity... a theme Black Lives Matter is about in our society today.

Yet I can't help asking why people and societies don't all just get healed when we pray. And I don't have an answer. All I know is that Jesus healed people but not all people and he wasn't spared crucifixion. That's why it is a mystery. God alone sees the full story. We only see in part.

Sometimes we think healing is about getting our all singing and all dancing 22 year old body back. But this is a fantasy since life is a one way street and we can't turn the clock back. This was my problem when I tried to keep cycling as if I was in my 20s and my body said 'No!' back in 2018.

Sometimes we think prayer is magic and we use it to twist God's arm so that he will heal us in the way we think he should. I met this view when I was in a doctor's surgery and a guy who saw my shirt and collar pointed to the sky saying 'isn't he on your side... you shouldn't be here, don't you get special treatment?' Yet prayer isn't magic but trust that God is with us and will bring about our healing in his good time, whether in this life or the next.

So our challenge is to pray and trust. When we see things change as I did in South Africa, we thank God. When we don't we trust that God is working his purposes out in ways we can't see because the story of Jesus gives us that confidence.

And yes surprising things do happen. I saw South Africa change without the expected bloodshed and start its long and ongoing journey of healing. And I saw two friends whom I anointed and prayed for earlier this year leave hospital after very serious illnesses and both have recovered.

A Prayer of the Guild of St Raphael.

'Bless, O Lord, your Church in its ministry to the sick, that it may fulfil your holy will and purpose, and use all means of grace for the healing of your people; and grant to those who desire your healing, true penitence, full pardon and perfect peace; for your dear Son's sake, Jesus Christ our Lord' Amen