

1st Sunday of Lent

1st Reading: Deuteronomy 26.1-11

Psalm: 91:1-2, 9-16

2nd Reading: Romans 10.4-13

Gospel: Luke 4.1-15

Today we begin a series of sermons to encourage us in offering a ministry of healing prayer.

What do you think of what you hear the word healing? Do you think of the man in the white suit proclaiming 'hallelujah, you're healed'? maybe it's scepticism 'God doesn't heal today'? maybe it's disappointment 'why doesn't God heal me or my loved ones'? Or maybe like me it's an excitement and a longing to see God at work more in the here and now.

Late last year, the wardens and I discerned that we needed some training in healing ministry – so we were more effective both in offering this ministry to others, but also experiencing it for ourselves.

I'm no expert – I need to learn more too. The first time I remember praying for someone was when I was 12. My grandmother was dying of cancer and I overheard my parents talking about her and how her prognosis was poor. I prayed for healing for her and two days later she died.

Over the coming weeks we will look a number of the healings Jesus does as recorded in the Bible.

Today, the first of our series, is a reminder of the main qualities we need for healing.

Compassion – we need compassion and we need to try to see others the way God sees them and to feel what God feels. How often when you meet someone in need do we feel 'our heart goes out to them'? How often do we feel such empathy with those in need that we could cry with them and for them? Jesus always heals out of his compassion – every time he heals the Bible says he is moved with compassion...

Confidence – In both the old and new testament's we are told it is God's will to heal. Jesus promises to hear us when we call to him. He sends his disciples out to heal. Before he ascends he tells the disciples that all his followers (including those to come – you and me) will place their hands on sick people and make them well. Jesus has given us authority and the Holy Spirit to heal the sick.

Courage – that we can do it in Jesus' name and that we need to take risks to offer it to people. How often have you taken a risk and asked someone if they would like healing?

Finally we need perseverance – it might not happen immediately and so we need patience and commitment to follow it through. Sometimes healing takes a lifetime, sometimes it is instant. It still happens and it is still happening.

Greatest danger is cynicism... putting a wall around ourselves where we believe that it doesn't happen and so it won't. Eventually we end up saying it will never happen and we don't even offer it anymore.

Some simple ways to start...

- Listen to the person to what they want to pray for. This might sound simple, but listening carefully to the person will help us to understand the situation and what their need is.
- Ask God to show you what this person needs. Sometimes someone shares with you that they have had pain for many years – and asking God to show you the root cause of the situation can help you to pray for them (and can help them identify their real need). Someone who's had headaches for 18 months, in conversation may share with you a significant event that happened 18 months ago that is the cause of their headaches – that can be emotional or mental, not just physical.
- Invite the Holy Spirit. Sometimes this can be to hold the person's hand or to lay hands on them and say 'Come Holy Spirit'. We've been programmed to shut our eyes when we pray, but often reading the signals – facial expressions, body language, physical changes helps us to see more deeply the presence of the Holy Spirit. See what God is doing for this person.
- After some time ask the person what's going on. It might be that they are feeling something in their body during this prayer. Sometimes we get so caught up in the prayer that we forget to speak with the person and to ask them if anything is happening. Something doesn't have to happen for God to be present, but often God makes himself known – in peace or physical changes.
- Most importantly, when you've finished praying don't place burdens on one another. This is especially the case when the person hasn't felt that they have been healed... the healing is happening, we need to believe that. Saying to the person 'you've not been healed because...' will leave them feeling weighed down. Remind the person that healing is happening and urge them to look for the signs this week and come back next week for more prayer and commit to praying for that person through the week. There is no limit to the number of times one can be prayed for.

After the service there will be an opportunity for prayer at the communion rail. I invite you to come forward for prayer for yourself, for your friends or for anyone. There will be someone to pray with you.