

4th Sunday of Lent

1st Reading: Joshua 5:2-12

Psalm: 32

2nd Reading: 2 Corinthians 5:16-21

Gospel: Luke 15:11-32

Over the past few weeks we have considered the qualities we find in how Jesus offers healing to people. We began by recalling that healing begins with having compassion for other people, feeling what God feels for them and looking at them as God does; then we considered how we need confidence in God's healing power – the reminder it is God who heals, not us and in prayer we are placing other people into God's hands.

We continue this morning by reflecting on the courage we need to have when we seek to offer healing to others. While this morning's Gospel is a parable not an actual experience of healing, it offers us some insights into the two kinds of courage we need.

The first kind of courage we need is courage to take a risk to receive healing ourselves. Hand in hand with having the confidence we need that God is the one who heals, we need to have courage to ask for that healing. The prodigal son ventures off into the world in search of fame and fortune but finds himself caring for pigs and eating their food. Over time, he remembers that his father is a generous man and he musters his courage and returns home. He doesn't expect to be received in the way he is (with his father running down the street when he sees him coming) but he goes home anyway.

Can you imagine what he must have felt like? There must have been times when we thought his father wouldn't receive him at all. He concocts a story, rehearses it over and over before having courage to return. We can be like that too... we can get so caught up in our own struggles that we can forget that Jesus is waiting for us and **wants** to heal us – we just need to go to him. Sometimes we are fearful that God doesn't really want us to be healed (physically, emotionally and psychologically), that we've made our own mistakes and are being punished for them... the prodigal son must have felt like that, but he mustered his courage and returned only to find that his father was waiting for him and bestowed on him the full blessing of the household.

The second kind of courage we need is to take the risk to offer God's healing to others. I'm not sure if you're like me but when people say they are sick, I'm often a bit reluctant to offer to pray for, or with, them.

A few weeks ago, I stumbled upon this story from John Wimber. He had a wonderful gift of healing but he was at pains to explain it did not come easily, he needed to trust God and have courage that it would happen. In the early days he felt God challenge him to preach every week on healing and for months he did this and offered prayers after the church service as we do. For months they did this and no one got healed – in fact it got so bad that all those doing the praying caught all the diseases that people had come to be healed of.

Courageously he kept going. After one service he prayed for a man for almost two hours and nothing happened. He finally lost it, he fell on the floor, broken, and began to weep. All that pain,

all that anger, all that hurt and disappointment all just flowed out. I pick up his story in his own words...

The next morning I was woken by our phone ringing. One of our newest members was on the line. He said "I just got a brand new job and I have got to go to work today, but my wife is sick with a fever. I can't stay at home and look after the kids and we can't find a babysitter. Can you come and pray for her." 'I'll be right there' I said. I hung up the phone and stared at the ceiling 'God, look what you've got me into this time! This guy really believes this stuff, he's going to lose his job and I'm going to have to look after the kids all day.' We arrived at his house and the husband led me into the bedroom and his wife looked terrible. Her face was red and swollen with fever... 'Oh no, this looks like a hard one.' I walked over and laid hands on her and mumbled a faithless prayer and I turned around and began explaining to her husband why some people do not get healed. It was a talk I had perfected over the previous ten months. I was well into my explanation when his eye caught something behind me. Then he started to grin. I turned around to see his wife out of bed, looking like a new person. 'What's happened to you?' I ask! "I'm well" she said, "you healed me. Would you like to stay for coffee and breakfast?" I could not believe she was well. I politely declined her offer of hospitality and left. Half way back to my car I fully realised what had happened.

We need to have courage that God will heal people and be prepared to offer a prayer for people.

After the service there will be another opportunity for prayer at the communion rail. I invite you to come forward for prayer for your own healing, healing for your friends and loved ones... or to be there to pray with someone else.