**Healing Service during Evensong, Sunday 20 October 2024, Wells Cathedral**

**Sermon written by the Revd Preb Gillian Bunce and delivered by the Revd Rosie Lunn**

**Joshua 14:6-14 Matthew 12:1-21 (NIV) Psalm 104**

**Hymns 374 How sweet the name of Jesus sounds 244 Glory to thee my God this night**

**Joshua 14:6-14 Allotment for Caleb**

**6**Now the people of Judah approached Joshua at Gilgal, and Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite said to him, “You know what the Lord said to Moses the man of God at Kadesh Barnea about you and me. **7**I was forty years old when Moses the servant of the Lord sent me from Kadesh Barnea to explore the land. And I brought him back a report according to my convictions, **8**but my fellow Israelites who went up with me made the hearts of the people melt in fear. I, however, followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly. **9**So on that day Moses swore to me, ‘The land on which your feet have walked will be your inheritance and that of your children forever, because you have followed the Lord my God wholeheartedly.’

**10**“Now then, just as the Lord promised, he has kept me alive for forty-five years since the time he said this to Moses, while Israel moved about in the wilderness. So here I am today, eighty-five years old! **11**I am still as strong today as the day Moses sent me out; I’m just as vigorous to go out to battle now as I was then. **12**Now give me this hill country that the Lord promised me that day. You yourself heard then that the Anakites were there and their cities were large and fortified, but, th`e Lord helping me, I will drive them out just as he said.”

**13**Then Joshua blessed Caleb son of Jephunneh and gave him Hebron as his inheritance. **14**So Hebron has belonged to Caleb son of Jephunneh the Kenizzite ever since, because he followed the Lord, the God of Israel, wholeheartedly.

**Matthew 12:1-21**

**12**At that time Jesus went through the grainfields on the Sabbath. His disciples were hungry and began to pick some heads of grain and eat them. **2**When the Pharisees saw this, they said to him, “Look! Your disciples are doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath.”

**3**He answered, “Haven’t you read what David did when he and his companions were hungry? **4**He entered the house of God, and he and his companions ate the consecrated bread—which was not lawful for them to do, but only for the priests. **5**Or haven’t you read in the Law that the priests on Sabbath duty in the temple desecrate the Sabbath and yet are innocent? **6**I tell you that something greater than the temple is here. **7**If you had known what these words mean, ‘I desire mercy, not sacrifice,’[[a](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua14:6-14;Matthew12:1-21,&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23497a)] you would not have condemned the innocent. **8**For the Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.”

**9**Going on from that place, he went into their synagogue, **10**and a man with a shrivelled hand was there. Looking for a reason to bring charges against Jesus, they asked him, “Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath?”

**11**He said to them, “If any of you has a sheep and it falls into a pit on the Sabbath, will you not take hold of it and lift it out? **12**How much more valuable is a person than a sheep! Therefore, it is lawful to do good on the Sabbath.”

**13**Then he said to the man, “Stretch out your hand.” So, he stretched it out and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other. **14**But the Pharisees went out and plotted how they might kill Jesus.

**15**Aware of this, Jesus withdrew from that place. A large crowd followed him, and he healed all who were ill. **16**He warned them not to tell others about him. **17**This was to fulfil what was spoken through the prophet Isaiah:

**18**“Here is my servant whom I have chosen,
    the one I love, in whom I delight;
I will put my Spirit on him,
    and he will proclaim justice to the nations.
**19**He will not quarrel or cry out;
    no one will hear his voice in the streets.
**20**A bruised reed he will not break,
    and a smouldering wick he will not snuff out,
till he has brought justice through to victory.
**21**    In his name the nations will put their hope.”[[b](https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=Joshua14:6-14;Matthew12:1-21,&version=NIV#fen-NIV-23511b)]

Firstly, something about me… I wanted to be a doctor when I was at primary school. The feeling never really went away. It started with just wanting to help poorly people get better. That seemed to mean being a doctor. At that age, it was reasonable enough not to be aware of the difference between medicine and healing. I’ve been trying to understand and differentiate them ever since, having come to realise that they are by no means the same thing.

However, some things, are common to both. We take it for granted that anyone, whether practicing medicine conventionally or undertaking to pray for others, should ‘above all do no harm.’ Also, that people in such roles should be discreet. Seeking help makes us vulnerable and we need to know that our trust will not be violated. Once lost, it cannot easily be restored. These general principles were summed up two and a half thousand years ago, by the Hippocratic Oath. They would have underpinned such relationships in Jesus’ time.

With that in mind, we might note that not many of Jesus’ healings take place with any degree of confidentiality. Most of them, like this one, were very public indeed. In most cases, the Gospels relate that that Jesus openly asked people what they wanted. This man with a shrivelled hand gave his consent by actively co-operating: ‘stretch out your hand, and he stretched it out… and it was completely restored, just as sound as the other.’ On the surface, this seems instant and straightforward; a bit like a fairy tale ending; ‘and they all lived happily ever after.’

**But** if we give our imagination ‘the right to roam,’ there is so much that lies **behind** these powerful stories, which may not lead straight into the sunny uplands of a happy ending or the beginning of a new chapter…

We wonder how healing might have changed this man’s life. He would be able to rejoin his family, associate with ‘normal’ healthy people, having been an outcast. That is genuinely joyous and happy. And it’s generally where we move on. We don’t continue asking, ‘**So, what happens next?**’

The man has not been able to work, but he could beg, and he may have got quite good at it! We don’t know. And what else was he good for? If he’d previously had a trade, did he still have the necessary skills, strength or hardened hands to work? Was there enough work to go round? During his exclusion, his family would have adapted. Where might he fit in now? Telling his story is powerful in the short term, but it won’t put bread on the table for long. **So, what happens next?**

We generally think of healings as miracle stories. And we probably file them away as ‘wonders,’ and nothing much changes in us. But if we chew them over, ponder them as embodied **wisdom stories**, we let them do their work in us. Then we find that nothing seems quite the same…

In today’s Gospel, Jesus puts everything in the context of **Sabbath;** his conversation, story and actions. No work is permitted on the Sabbath, when people worship and rest in memory of creation and freedom. As ever, he pushes them, and us, to examine this, to dig beneath the surface. What is at the **heart** of it? What’s the wisdom beneath the command? On such a day, are we **really** to go hungry or ignore the opportunity to save the life of one of his creatures? Why wouldn’t we firstly respond to that need and then return to our worship? **‘Above all, do no harm.’** As ever, Jesus focuses on the genuine need. He sits light to convention, which is always challenging for the establishment. But he goes to the heart of the matter, helping all of us to wonder, ‘**so, what happens next?’**

We naturally pray for healing, for people and for situations. As children, which of us didn’t ask for someone we loved, to get better? That’s often where the healing ministry starts. It isn’t about having healing hands or a special gift or anything else. It’s about loving people, longing for the best for them, praying for them, getting out of the way and handing them over to God. (And just a cautionary note: many of us still find it hard not to tell God what we think would be best for the person in front of us, or their loved one!) But ultimately, we are to let God be God, leaving these precious people for whom we pray with God, knowing they and their burdens are not ours to carry.

All this, helps us become more ‘real.’ We are commissioned to do what we can, underpinning that with committed prayer. We are to learn all we can from the Bible, from each other, from training and our community. The prayer support of a group which meets together regularly is vital for this and much more. All this helps us to come before God with open hearts, and to pray for each other and all who ask us to do so.

There are questions I want to leave with each of you today. What do you long for in your own life in terms of healing and growth? In the lives of others? And what might you need to nurture that, to help it to grow?

**So, what happens next?**