



St Marylebone
Parish Church

Choral Eucharist Sunday 11.00 Trinity 10; The Priest Pastor

It's been a tough old year for our lovely church building. A grand old lady, she has felt the strains of aging and has had a major face lift, a brand new coiffure and significant attention to unmentionable parts of her undercarriage. And it's taking a heck of a long time.

The last time anything major happened to the building was back in the 1980's when the crypt was cleared and the bold vision of the Rector at the time, Christopher Hamel Cooke, was to turn St Marylebone Parish Church into a place of healing and wholeness. Medical healing from a doctor's surgery and the hospitals around about, Psychological healing from the psychotherapists of our HCC and Christian Healing of spirit, soul and body through services and pastoral care.

Most of us will be grateful for medical healing, though the poor old NHS is another grand old lady that needs attention. Many of us will be grateful for psychological healing. But Christian healing? Isn't that a bit niche? Surely Christ only really healed when he was on earth and nowadays it's a rather dubious area that unscrupulous 'faith healers' or dodgy churches place too much emphasis on.

Is healing really Church of England? Is it really still 'Marylebone'?

Well, as a former Prime Minister didn't say, Yes, Yes, Yes!

Healing was at the absolute heart of Jesus's ministry on earth. Today we heard how he healed a woman bent double. On a holy day, the sabbath, in the synagogue. You weren't supposed to work on the sabbath, but what better day to heal? This was God's work par excellence. Who knows what it was that weighed down that woman. Was it a physical cause? Was it psychological? Was it spiritual oppression? Almost certainly a combination of all three, because in human beings the spiritual, the physical and the psychological combine.

We are holistic beings. The term 'demon' can be off putting when we read the New Testament but that was how people understood dis-ease of every kind. It wasn't a judgement upon the person.

Christ came to bring fullness of life, and anything that gets in the way of that can be seen as opposing his desire for every person to be whole. Ill health, injustice, social isolation of every kind can bring a sense of oppression to the soul.

We only have to look around us at the world to realise that there are forces of dark as well as forces of light at work.

In the gospel account Jesus announces that the woman is healed, and *then* lays his hands on her in compassion and affirmation. He describes her in front of the crowds as a 'daughter of Abraham' restoring her to the community and giving her back her dignity. She can now look people in the face.

If ever our world needed the healing and renewal brought by Christ it is surely now. Spiritually, physically, emotionally, politically, we are groaning post Covid. Anxiety, exhaustion, loss of so many kinds. Food and fuel poverty is rising astronomically. Climate change is wreaking havoc on our weather.

Relationships are under strain. Times are very hard for so many of us.

We need social action, justice, and hope. We need healing.

Can the church do anything about this? Should we even bother? What can we, confused, exhausted and discouraged ourselves offer the world?

Its tempting for the church to retreat. But.... is that faithful to our calling?

There are plenty of unscrupulous people on the internet who will charge hundreds of pounds for a useless online healing ritual

that preys on vulnerable people. People will always seek healing, and if the church is not offering that ministry they will go elsewhere.

When Jesus sent out apostles and disciples to share in his mission, he instructed them to proclaim the kingdom, and heal the sick.

Jesus cared about the crowds who were harassed, helpless and suffering.

He sought out, he listened, he healed, he valued, he accepted.

He wanted those who followed him to care too and to do something about it.

They came back rejoicing because of the healing that had happened in his name.

It wasn't dependent on the disciples, the authority and power came from Jesus who had sent them.

Healing the sick therefore is also a dominical command just as the commandment to 'Do this in remembrance of me.'

Of course all healing comes from God through the skill and care of health professionals, through the prayer and ministry of the church and through the healing words and contact that can be shared informally.

The Church for centuries has been at the fore of supporting healthcare; the ancient Rule of St Benedict holds that the care of the sick is to be placed above and before every other duty, as if indeed Christ were being directly served by waiting on them

And when the church offers the laying on of hands with prayer for healing and anointing, as we do every week here at Marylebone and once a month, we ask that God will bring light into dark situations, healing and wholeness. None of us can make any assumptions or promises about what God is going to do in response to those prayers, except the certainty that he brings love and compassion into every situation.

Sometimes people experience healing in mind, body or spirit. Sometimes they come to terms with something that has been difficult to accept. Sometimes they discover the secret to their healing is in their own hands. Sometimes they are given strength and patience to endure their own or other's illness and to find God's presence in it. Sometimes, even those who are approaching their death can find reconciliation, healing of relationships with others and with God. I certainly saw that happen when I worked as a hospice chaplain.

Whatever does or doesn't happen, the infinite creativity of God draws forth something of worth from every prayer. Sometimes it can only be years later that that is recognised.

Jesus did not cure everybody and his miraculous powers did not prevent his own suffering and death. Yet, where prayer for healing is trustingly offered in the Church, glimpses of the kingdom of God are seen and experienced. The whole movement of the Kingdom is the inexorable transformation from death to life.

And the signs of that Kingdom are the sacraments that mediate Christ's presence with us here and now. Baptism, the eucharist, confession and absolution, anointing and laying on of hands. Through them, the kingdom breaks through into our lives, and we can say 'the Lord is here!'

So healing prayer is not niche, it is an integral part of our ministry here at Marylebone.

And this year, on Sunday October 16th we are hosting the London Diocesan Healing Service. There will be fabulous music with a full choir, laying on of hands, anointing, a chance to make your confession and to have a pastoral conversation. And in November, we are planning to offer prayer for healing on a Sunday morning following Holy Communion. So do come and be part of those occasions. And invite others. Or just come to our Wednesday lunchtime services and 1st Sunday evening services that have been faithfully offered ever since the 80s. Or just ask anytime; that one to one prayer is always available. Not just for ourselves, but receiving the laying on of hands and anointing for another person is a lovely and tangible way of praying for someone else.

Just as the ministry of healing was at the very centre of our Lords ministry on earth, it needs to be at the heart of the Church's ministry today. Intentional, missional, faithful. For he offers himself to us and to the world. Come Holy Spirit. Come Lord Jesus. Come to meet us at our point of need, send forth your healing and renew the face of the earth. Amen.