

Trinity IX

June 20th, 2024

Mark 6:53-56

And wherever he went, into villages or cities, or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that might even touch the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.'

I wonder what your reaction to that passage is?

At one level of course, it is lovely. Wonderful. All who touched it were healed! Lives put back together... strength and life and goodness poured back into people. What is not to love?

And we might also think, well of course. If Jesus is we say He is – indeed, if He is who *He* said he is – God made human, God living a human life, well, this is exactly what you'd expect to see happening around him. God means Life, Glory, Beauty, Power, Goodness, all those things in their fullness, all those things in power and intensity beyond our imagining. If God walks among us, if all the fullness of God dwells in a human person, then yes, you'd expect to see amazing things around that person. If people got close to him, they'd come right. The lame would run, the deaf hear, the blind see, the dead raised. Indeed, if those things *didn't* happen, there'd be a big question mark over his claim.

Now, as it happens, most historians agree that Jesus was a healer. Obviously, they might disagree on whether he was anything else, whether he was Son of God, and they might disagree on *how* he healed – whether it was through divine power, or some more natural, psychological, method. But that he healed, no-one really disputes.

That, though, doesn't stop some of us being a little sceptical – or, maybe a little sad, a little wistful – when we read a passage like today's. 'And wherever he went, into villages or cities, or farms, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged him that might even touch the fringe of his cloak, and all who touched it were healed.'

We can believe that, even if we think there might be a little exaggeration in the reports. We can believe it, but still feel a little sad. Because what about us? What about now?

Because *our* experience of healing is very different. Yes, it is there. And sometimes some people are lucky enough for it to be there obviously, memorably, and apparently miraculously. Tumours do sometimes vanish, and it looks like there's no other explanation than God. Sometimes. Some glorious times. But *most* times, and let's be honest, **by far and away** most times, it is not like that. Most times, healing is something we long for and don't experience. And when we do, it's often ambiguous, partial, half-way healing. It's not like the Gospels. It's not, usually, amazing.

What can we say about that?

Well, the first thing to say is that that's exactly how it should be. We are in the in-between times. Jesus, in the most obvious sense, isn't here. He is ascended into the heavens, and we are left waiting for the time when his presence fills all things, when the glory and beauty and power and goodness of God aren't just restricted to one time and space, one human body, but when they fill everything. When what we saw happen around Jesus in first century Israel, happens throughout the universe. But that time is, obviously, not yet. It is still to come. It's what we mean when the Creed talks about him coming again to judge the living and the dead, what St. Paul means when in 1 Corinthians he writes our waiting for God to become all in all.

And right now, we find ourselves in the meantime, the in-between times, between Jesus' time on earth, and His return in glory. And it is in the nature of those times that actually things aren't obvious. They're not in their fullness, in their power. Now we see, says Paul, as if in a glass darkly. As if in a mirror, dimly. *Then* we shall see face to face, but not now.

Now in that famous passage, so often read at weddings, St. Paul was talking about love, saying that our experiences of love now are but a glimmer, a foretaste of the fullness we will, one day, know. But the same principle holds right across the Christian life. Is your experience of God weak, uncertain, tenuous? Of course it is: now we see in a mirror dimly. Is prayer confusing, difficult, often a struggle? What else did you expect in the in-between times? Is healing fragmentary, partial, insecure? Once again, yes, that's how it is for now.

For now. Our Gospel is that, one day, a great healing will break over us, and break over the whole world. There will be nothing ambiguous, nothing transitory, nothing fragile about it. The goodness and power and beauty and life of God will flow through everything, and all that mars and wounds human life will be swept away. The earth shall be filled with the glory of God, as the waters cover the sea. *That's* the healing we wait for – the healing we wait for with utter confidence.

And sometimes, to give us strength as we wait, to keep hope alive, for reasons we do not know, and cannot comprehend, that ultimate future as it were flashes forward, flashes out into the here and now. Touches people here and now. When it does it is wonderful. Though of course, it raises its own awkward questions – why here, and not there? Why this person, not that one? And why not more often? There is no real answer to those questions, we can't begin to figure it out. But the important point is that those healings are just outcrops, advance tasters, of the great healing coming for everyone.

So, when we pray for people to be healed in church every Sunday, as we do, let's be clear about what we're doing. We are not actually expecting laser beam interventions in response to our prayers, as if God will undo the effects of dementia here, or zap a tumour there. We don't really expect miracles. Very rarely they might come, and I will be the first to rejoice if they do! But that wasn't the point of our prayers. The point was to hold each and every one of the sick and the suffering in the light of the great healing that is coming. To say to ourselves, and to them, that you can't really think of them in isolation from that greatest of all facts. They are not just somebody with Alzheimers, somebody with cancer, somebody with depression... they're somebody with those things over whom the great healing will one day break. They are somebody who when everything about them seems sick and weak and beaten, still have a glorious Gospel destiny. Who, even when they have died, will still be part of that great healing. Will still be raised up, and filled with life beyond imagining.

We pray for our sick, and our guilty, and even our dead as a great big statement of hope. In the face of everything that crushes us, and beats us down, our prayers are like a soldier's flag, planted right in the heart of enemy territory. This life, we say, might look beaten, desolate, over-run. Right now, it *is* all those things. But now we see in a glass darkly. Healing is coming. It will break over all of us, break over this life. It will bring us all to glory.