

“What do you want me to do for you? – My teacher, let me see again.” Mk 10:51)

There is a thread that connects our Gospel reading for today with that for last Sunday. Both concern a request brought to Jesus. In last Sunday’s reading, James and John come to Jesus seeking places of prominence in the Kingdom of God over and above the rest of the disciples. This Sunday, Bartimaeus comes with his simple, heart felt plea, ‘Lord, I just want to see again.’

As we meet Sunday by Sunday for prayer, it is in itself a reminder that our prayer has to be more than just an attempt to twist God’s arm to get him to see things our way. It is more a matter of tuning in, seeking a harmony between my hopes and fears and desires and the mind and purposes of God.

To return to our Gospel reading, ‘What do you want me to do for you?’ On that roadside we have a coming together of Bartimaeus in his blindness and Jesus in his compassion and power to heal. Others had tried to shut Bartimaeus up, to tell him to leave Jesus alone. Jesus calls him to his side – Bartimaeus goes away his sight restored.

What exactly is going on in the healing ministry of Jesus? As we read the texts, yes, we read of physical symptoms – but more than that. We read of faith, on other occasions of sins forgiven. The Greek word that is translated here as ‘heal’ σωζω, also has connotations of salvation, of making whole. Your faith has healed you; your faith has saved you; your faith has made you whole. Jesus in his ministry touched and responded to the whole person, body, mind and soul.

A few years ago, in the Report of the Church's Ministry for Healing to the General Synod of the Church of Ireland, there was a definition of Christian Healing that has always appealed to me:

‘Christian Healing is God meeting us at our point of deepest need.’

What are our deepest needs? Yes we may have physical ailments, the legs are not a supple, the back not as flexible, the eyes not as sharp as they used to be. There may be more serious problems, life threatening disease that brings us face to face with our own mortality, maybe even causing us to question does anyone care, does God even care. There are needs that go beyond the physical – needs of love, of acceptance, of hope, of strength. Even in my darkest moments I find these in the life and person of Jesus.

A young student, with all the certainty that only the young can bring to these issues, once challenged a University Chaplain, “Religion is just a crutch.” to which the Chaplain replied, “Which of us is not limping?” Each of us has needs of love, of acceptance, of hope and strength that God alone can meet.

As I have remarked several times over the last few weeks, ours is an incarnational faith, God comes to us in the person of Jesus. As we have been reminded in our reading from the Letter to the Hebrews, in Jesus, God himself knows what it is like to know pain, loneliness, times of despair, rejection, suffering and even death itself – so I can come to him in confidence knowing he knows what it is to be human and all that that entails.

A second aspect of incarnational faith is that God has chosen to work through people, through the Church, through the likes of you and me. In recognising the healing ministry of Jesus, God present in the world, continuing to be present and working in and through the life of his Church, we then must come to see the Church as a community of healing, a community that recognises and responds, that meets people at their point of deepest need. This is where the New Testament expression of the Church as the Body of Christ is very powerful. We, as members of the Body of Christ, are called to be nothing less than instruments; living, loving instruments of the healing and reconciling love of Christ in the world of today.

The community that worships, that celebrates the love of God in Christ must therefore be the community that goes out into the world to witness to that love. Our total life as a community, our worship, the way we conduct our business, the things we do together socially, we do as a community of healing, a community that recognises and responds, that meets people at their point of deepest need.

Just in closing, could I ask you to turn to hymn 503 and I will just read it.

Hymn 503

- 1 Make me a channel of your peace:
where there is hatred let me bring your love,
where there is injury, your pardon, Lord,
and where there's doubt, true faith in you:
*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul!*
- 2 Make me a channel of your peace:
where there's despair in life let me bring hope,

where there's darkness, only light,
and where there's sadness, ever joy:

*O Master, grant that I may never seek
so much to be consoled as to console;
to be understood, as to understand,
to be loved, as to love with all my soul!*

- 3 Make me a channel of your peace:
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in giving of ourselves that we receive,
and in dying that we're born to eternal life.

*Sebastian Temple (1928-97)
based on 'Prayer of St Francis of Assisi'*

May God enable each one of us to look at each other through the eyes of Christ himself, to recognise the deepest needs, that we may be instruments of the healing, reconciling, strengthening love of Christ, that we may in our total life together be a community of healing.