

**Sermon series**  
**The Church: What are we about?**

### 3. Forgiveness, Healing and Wholeness

Readings

James 5: 13-16

Matthew 9: 1-8

This autumn we're having a series of sermons about the Church, and posing the question 'What are we about?'

Today we're thinking about forgiveness and healing and wholeness.  
I feel like I've been given a very big subject!

So let's start by looking at Jesus.  
Let's look at what he thought he was about.

Near the beginning of Luke's gospel (*ch 4: 18-19*), Jesus goes to the synagogue in Nazareth, the town where he lived as a boy. He's given a scroll to read – nothing unusual about that – but when he sits down again afterwards he says that this particular piece of prophecy has been fulfilled right there, that day. And what he said was this:

*God's Spirit is on me;  
he's chosen me to preach the Message of good news to the poor.  
Sent me to announce pardon to prisoners and recovery of sight to the blind,  
and to set the burdened and battered free.*

(Message translation)

And over the course of his ministry we see Jesus doing exactly that.  
Offering forgiveness and bringing about healing and wholeness.  
Putting things right.

In the introduction to a book on reconciliation, Justin Welby puts it like this:

*There is good news because, in this broken world, God works tirelessly to mend, to heal and to reconcile, bringing people, families and nations back together and back to God. It's not easy and it's not risk-free and it always walks hand-in-hand with truth, justice and sacrifice.*

*The God we meet in the person of Jesus takes all of this on. He comes to earth and walks with us. He becomes everything it means to be human and transforms our brokenness from within. He speaks difficult words, and he speaks healing words. Ultimately, on the cross, he pays the price for challenging and transforming the*

*brokenness of human life and, through his death we receive the invitation to a liberated life.*

Jesus Christ is full of compassion, mercy and forgiveness. He brings about healing and wholeness.

In today's gospel reading we hear about the paralysed man who's brought to Jesus by his friends. If it hadn't been for them he'd never even have reached Jesus' healing presence – so their role is key.

God is ready to forgive even before we ask.

And slightly surprisingly Jesus tells the man his sins are forgiven – he didn't ask for that – wasn't it obvious what kind of healing he was hoping for?

Jesus knew though, that at that time, sickness was seen as a result of sin or having done something wrong. The thinking was that it couldn't be cured until the sin was forgiven. That's not how we see it today and in fact on another occasion Jesus made it very clear that a man who was blind was not blind because he was sinful. But for this man, in this case, he needed the assurance that he was forgiven. Lifting the weight of the guilt he was feeling was part of his healing.

Jesus performs lots of signs and miracles of healing. What this story also highlights is Jesus' authority to forgive sins (and that's what caused such a stir at the time).

And Matthew tells us this as part of a group of 3 stories he's arranged together – the other 2 coming immediately before the one we heard today.

Jesus calms the storm on Lake Galilee – here we see the authority of Jesus over the wind and the waves – and of course the parallel with the way he calms the storms in our lives – giving his presence and his peace.

Then there's the healing of two demon-possessed men coming out from the tombs to meet Jesus, showing Jesus authority over the forces of evil.

Jesus is fulfilling his manifesto – bringing forgiveness, bringing healing and bringing wholeness wherever he goes.

That's what he's about.

So what are we about as a church?

In this diocese of Oxford, our common vision is to be a more Christ-like church. So, as followers of Jesus, we are called to be a community of people who are forgiving, who are kind and compassionate and merciful, and who play their part in bringing about healing and wholeness (*Col 3: 12-15*).

Care for the sick has always been part of the ministry of the church and in our reading from James we're told to pray for the sick. God has promised always to give us his Spirit and we're reminded that prayer *is* powerful and effective, and will bring healing – sometimes in the gift of physical healing, and sometimes in the gift of strength to bear weakness.

The loving forgiveness of God is absolute; it only has to be received not earned. And for many people that's hard to understand or to accept. We have a role in sharing that. People can become trapped in feelings of guilt or struggle with self-worth. We need to tell them that they are loved. And being Christ-like *also* means showing that love and forgiveness to others ourselves – in all that's going on in our daily lives.

Forgiving others is often not easy, particularly if some terrible abuse or atrocity has happened – often it's a journey that needs to happen in stages – but we need to have the courage to take that first step – rather than being caught in a cycle of resentment. And God will help us. Forgiveness is at the very heart of the gospel, and at the heart of that is the love of God.

So come with me now to Lake Galilee to the church of St Peter's Primacy. It's very near to the town of Capernaum where the paralysed man was healed. The storm has passed and the wind has dropped, and sitting on the pebbles on the beach you can see the water stretching away from you as calm as can be. Here – or somewhere very near here – is where the risen Jesus forgave Peter. Peter denied he knew Jesus three times before the crucifixion. But Jesus isn't looking for an opportunity to tell Peter off – he wants to restore the relationship – he wants to put things right. And so he asks Peter if he loves him, because nothing is more transformative than love.

This is what we are about.

Let us pray

*God of all mercy,  
you have set aside our sins  
and give us your healing:  
grant that we who are made whole in Christ  
may bring that healing to this broken world,  
in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord.*

(Trinity 12, post communion prayer adapted)

Amen

*Wendy Middleton*