

Sermon 4 February 2018

Mark 1:29-34

This passage is all about the healing power of Jesus. Just prior to Jesus healing Peter's mother-in-law, he had been teaching in the synagogue and had driven an evil spirit out of a man, much to the astonishment of those present. Immediately after worship in the synagogue, they go to the home of Simon and Andrew where Jesus heals Peter's mother-in-law of a fever. Later that evening many people come to him for healing and he obliges. All this in one day!

The demands on Jesus were massive and as a consequence we do see the human side of Jesus. He did get tired and needed to retire for some rest and prayer. But even then, as we hear in this reading, people sought him out. A couple of points I want to emphasise.

Firstly, just to reiterate what I said last Sunday. Jesus had a relationship with God that was second to none, and yet he still needed to spend a huge amount of time in prayer. So what does that tell us? If it is necessary for Jesus to spend so much time in prayer, we need to probably spend more! Food for thought.

Another observation, we see so many people coming to Jesus in their need. That's ok, but I think there is a message here for us. If we really want to establish a strong and meaningful relationship with God, we shouldn't just approach him when we want something from him. Establishing a relationship with God is very similar to establishing a relationship with anyone. Obviously, there is a difference but the process should be the same.

If I made an approach to you only when I wanted something from you, would you really be open to a meaningful relationship with me? I very much doubt it. It is the same with God. There is a saying, 'Many who have never prayed when the sun was shining, begin to pray when the cold winds come.' If we really want our prayers answered, I believe we need to establish that connection with God through regular, sincere prayer.

I want to finish by highlighting this point. We have talked about healing before. Healing is something that is happening today. The barrier to many people believing in God is the fact that God is not tangible and we cannot prove his existence. However, there are many things we can point to which indicate a presence of God. Healing is one of them.

Let me share with you a couple of examples. Dr Richard Casdorff is an experienced doctor and medical researcher. He has published more than eighty research papers in a career that has spanned almost six decades, and has earned the respect of his fellow doctors. In the mid 70s he undertook a research project with a difference. He interviewed ten people who claimed to have been miraculously healed of serious conditions. He examined all the case histories – X-rays, medical reports etc – and also submitted them to medical specialists for review.

In all ten cases, the evidence showed that an unusual healing had taken place after the patient received prayer for healing. Let me give you two examples.

Pearl was a doctor of speech therapy who had suffered from a range of medical problems – arthritis, kidney, gall bladder problems – for most of her life. By the time she was in her sixties she had to wear long leg braces because of weak knees and many falls. Other physical problems (fainting, headaches, nausea) also worsened. A devout Christian, she began praying for healing, then finally managed to get to a healing meeting. During the meeting she felt an unusual grinding sensation in her body, beginning with her left hip and gradually moving around her whole body and ending in her neck. She was able to walk unaided and regained full movement. She was fully healed.

Over just a few weeks Anne Soultz began to have serious problems reading, speaking and remembering. A series of brain scans and visits to different specialists revealed that she had a lesion that was increasing in size, consistent with a tumour. However, following prayer from a prayer group and attending a healing service, further scans showed no evidence of any abnormality. She was healed.

We cannot prove the existence of God, but there are countless indications that God is real and present in our lives. Healing is but one of them, but in the end, it does boil down to FAITH. Only if we are open to God will we see these indications for what they truly are.

Rev Warner Wilder