

Sermon 7 February 2021

Mark 1:29-39

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 Jesus 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 has been said before. 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 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 similar to establishing a relationship with anyone. There is a difference but the process should largely 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? Probably not. It is the same with God. There is a saying, *'Many who have never prayed when the sun is shining, begin to pray when the cold winds come.'* To ensure our prayers are answered, I believe we need to establish that connection with God through regular, sincere prayer.

I want to make two points about healing. The first is that we read of countless examples of healing in the Bible, both by Jesus himself and also the disciples, including Paul. Our first reading this morning is just one example. But miracles of healing have been taking place ever since. Let me give you one simple example.

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.

Two observations on this. 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 so many things we can point to which indicate a presence of God. Healing is one of them.

Second observation. Yes, healing often takes place in response to prayer, but often it doesn't, and we don't really know why. I guess it is just part of the wonderful mystery of God. There is a lot more I could say about that but let's leave that for another day.

The other point I want to make about healing and this is very important and really does lie at the heart of what I want to say this morning. Healing come in a wide range of forms, and certainly is not confined to the dramatic and the miraculous. You and I might not be able to raise people from the dead, as Jesus did on more than one occasion, or as Peter did with Tabitha (Acts 9:36-41), but we can heal.

Providing comfort and support when someone is feeling either down, sick or sad – that is healing. And that is something every one of us can do.

I am sure you have seen images of migrating geese flying in V formation. There is actually a reason why they fly in this formation. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. By flying in this formation, the whole flock is supporting each other and adds at least 70% greater flying range than if each bird flew on its own.

When the lead goose gets tired, he rotates back into the formation and another goose takes over the lead. The geese honk from behind to encourage and support those up front to keep going and keep up their speed.

When a goose gets sick or is wounded by a gunshot and falls out of formation and follow him down to help and protect him. They stay with him until he is able to fly back or dies, and then they either launch out on their own or catch up with the group.

We can learn a lot from the geese. Just as the geese honk to encourage and support, so we can support one another, though honking might not be the best way to go about this. It is good to know that we are encouraged and supported.

And just as the geese fall out to support and care for a mate who is in trouble, so can we care for others when they are experiencing trouble. We can do that by just being there for them. That is healing. We can do that by listening. That is healing. We can do that by simply letting them know we care. That is healing.

In what can be a very simple act of letting someone know we care, we fulfil Christ's commandment 'to love one another,' and I think we also give expression to the reality of God. God is the spirit of love working in people, through people. Or as John puts it so very well in 1 John 4:7 – *'Dear friends, let us continue to love one another, for love comes from God. Anyone who loves is born of God and knows God.'*

