

Sunday Sermon - 07.02.21
Delivered by Rev'd Julie Leaves

Do you know far an observant Jew is allowed to walk on the Sabbath without it being classed as “work”? According to chabad.org Jewish law sets the maximum walking range from one’s city to 2,000 cubits, just under a kilometre (However, this measurement starts 70 2/3 cubits (34 m) from the city limits.) Practically speaking, this means that you may not walk a straight line more than 960 metres in any direction in the wilds outside your city limits; but if I’ve understood correctly, walking within your city is fine. A walk to and from the Synagogue or to the home of family or friends is acceptable. So it was perfectly acceptable, and indeed right and fitting, for Jesus and his disciples to go to the house of Simon Peter’s mother in law. As soon as he enters the house, Jesus goes to her and took her by the hand and lifted her up. Then, we’re told, the fever left her, and she began to serve them, a beautiful response after being restored to wholeness.

Then, as the Sabbath ended and word started to get around, it must as seemed as if the whole city came in search of Jesus and his miraculous gift of healing. The Gospel account tells us, he cured many who were sick with various diseases and cast out demons, demanding silence of them.

Many of you will be aware that the Rev'd Dr Gemma Dashwood, as well as serving as Deacon in the parish of Goodna, has also just begun working with LifeFlight, which is an air ambulance service. She mentioned a programme that screening on 7+ called Air Ambulance ER that gives an idea of her medical work. It focuses on a number of groups in the UK, one of which is based in Teeside. If you were to watch it, you'd find the accents from that particular group strangely familiar, though often much stronger than the dulcet tones of our Rector. I've always held those in the healing profession in fairly high esteem but seeing the way these teams of men and women work together to bring the kind of medical resources and expertise usually only found in hospital emergency rooms, is incredible and awe-inspiring.

Christ as healer is a strong theme throughout the gospels, as Jesus brings not just physical healing but the deep sense of wholeness that knowing oneself to be loved by God brings. Jesus seems particularly drawn to those on the margins, those that the religious professionals often rejected. Our Lord showed forth the all-encompassing for creation that even now, as then can appear to be counter-cultural. When faced with the unconditional love of God, we can often feel unworthy and, let's be honest, we probably are but remember, “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.” We don't have to be worthy, although the knowledge of God's love often calls forth from within us a desire to amend and improve our way of living and interacting with those around us and indeed, the way we interact with God's creation.

St Paul speaks of doing anything to bring the proclamation of the Gospel to those who need to hear it; of the commission that he is entrusted with “ I have become all things to all people, that I might by all means save some. I do it all for the sake of the gospel so that I may share it's blessings. (1 Cor 9 22ff).

Of course, we never doubt the source of the strength that keeps Paul striving to fulfil his calling. His deep sense of Christ's spirit within him remains with him in whatever situation he might find himself. It is that same awareness of Spirit in which we all should aspire to cultivate. It can be incredibly difficult, especially when the world seems to be so confusing and frightening but we are given the most basic way, as we watch Jesus go about his ministry. He spent himself on others as he healed and loved and poured forth compassion on those who came seeking him but then, he pursued the stillness and strength found only in prayer and communion with the Creator. As we approach Lent it's a perfect time for us to pursue our own communion with the Creator. It can be tricky at times to keep this sense of God's presence. Sometimes the cares and concerns of the world can act as a hindrance. That's why routines of prayer and bible reading and study are so helpful but sometimes our patterns fall or fade. If you're anything like me, you might find it useful to have a specific date to really reapply yourself and perhaps take on a new or difference discipline. There will certainly be parish Lenten study to encourage and feed us, as we move through the suffering and passion of Christ towards that glorious celebration of Resurrection and abundant life.

I'd like to finish with a short blessing by Jan Richardson. She is a pastor, artist and author but blessings are definitely one of her strongest gifts.

*And All Be Made Well
A Healing Blessing
That each ill be released from you
and each sorrow be shed from you
and each pain be made comfort for you
and each wound be made whole in you
that joy will arise in you
and strength will take hold of you
and hope will take wing for you
and all be made well.*

–Jan Richardson