

Sermon: Revd Preb Julie Birkett, Healing Service, 15 October 2023 Wells Cathedral

1 John 3:1-15

May I speak in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen

After qualifying as a nurse and midwife I spent some time working at Hadassah (*Myrtle Tree*) Hospital in Jerusalem.

There I picked up helpful phrases of Hebrew such as “Cough it up” and “I want to be sick”.

On the wards in the morning we would greet one another in Hebrew, “Good Morning”, “Mah Shalomcha?” which literally means, “how’s your shalom?”
How is your peace?

How is your wholeness, your wellbeing,
your health, your completeness?

It is well known that our mental and spiritual state can affect our bodies, and our bodies can affect our mental and spiritual state in the same way.

Being whole means that body, mind and spirit are all aligned and in perfect balance.

When performing healing miracles, such as the woman with the issue of blood. Jesus often said, “your faith has made you whole.”- well physically, mentally and spiritually “. (*Matthew 9:22*)

We know that Jesus didn’t indiscriminately heal everyone eg. at the pool of Bethesda Jesus only healed one man. (*John 5:1–11*),

And there is a big difference between being cured and being made whole. Perhaps healing is more about wholeness than cure?

Wholeness brings peace— completeness— salvation— oneness with God— righteousness— Love.

Many of those he heals begin a new life of following Jesus and praising God. Jesus is one who makes whole. He gathers and heals disconnected and wounded parts of individuals, families and communities, bringing together those who are divided, separated, or left out.

He teaches his followers to love, accept and forgive, not only their friends but even their enemies.

He confronted systems that diminished, marginalised, or excluded those who were different or did not fit the status quo.

The writer of the first letter of John is overwhelmed by the love God has lavished upon us, a love that is beyond all our human imagining. (1 John 3:1)

The restorative and transformative power of God's extravagant love which takes the shape and symbolism of healing and radical forgiveness.

We each carry a certain amount of pain and brokenness.

If that pain is not healed and transformed, it increases with time, and we can become irritable and judgemental in our attitudes towards others.

Pain needs to be acknowledged and owned rather than projected elsewhere.

Healing begins when we acknowledge our need.

It's not so much about being sick, it's not being broken, - the real problem is saying, "I can do it by myself. I can go it alone."

Recently, The Church of England's House of Bishops agreed in principle that prayers asking for God's blessing for same-sex couples – known as *Prayers of Love and Faith* – should be commended for use.

It also concluded that structures for special services for same-sex couples, should go forward to be formally authorised under canon law and will bring the proposals to General Synod next month.

This will pave the way for a process that would lead to the authorisation of these special services.

This is painful and divisive for everyone on both sides of the debate.

There are some big decisions to make in the next few months and it's important we hold them all in prayer so that they can discern the most loving and faithful path.

It's crucial that this one painful issue does not polarise and split the Church of England which it threatens to do.

If we are divided how will we ever convince the world that the gospel is worth believing?

It would be like fishing with broken nets and wondering why we haven't caught any fish!

Earlier this year I enjoyed a tour of the Waterford Glass factory in Ireland. It was a fascinating experience and one of the highlights for me was seeing an enormous snowman made of glass, while for my husband John it was seeing the Ashes Trophy that was presented this year - to Australia as it happens but we won't dwell on that!

I was hoping for a seconds shop - you know, like when you visit a pottery or even in Clarks Village in Street , there are on sale "seconds" which aren't quite perfect!

But in Waterford - there are no seconds!

If the item does not meet their high specifications it is broken down, smashed, and the glass re-used.

Isn't it good God doesn't do that with us but instead keeps moulding us into the people he wants us to be.

It reminds me of the ancient Japanese art of Kintsugi, "golden joinery", or "golden repair" where broken pottery is mended with lacquer mixed with powdered gold - leaving a gold seam where the cracks were - making it stronger and more beautiful and more unique than it was before - recognising that brokenness and repair is part of its history rather than something to disguise, or hide.

Kintsugi - broken pots put together with gold; Transfigured.

Even more beautiful than before.

Our own failures and brokenness can be transfigured.

Even Conflict within and without can be transfigurative.

We live in a broken world.

Each us is broken, carrying our own hurts, pains and fears.

The church is broken because it is full of broken people -we do the things we should not do and leave undone the things we should do!

Some years ago, anthropologist Margaret Mead was asked by a student what she considered to be the first sign of civilization in a culture.

The student expected Mead to talk about fishhooks or clay pots or grinding stones. But no.

Mead said that the first sign of civilisation in an ancient culture was a femur that had been broken and then healed.

Mead explained that in the animal kingdom, if you break your leg, you die.

You cannot run from danger, get to the river for a drink or hunt for food. You are meat for prowling beasts.

No animal survives a broken leg long enough for the bone to heal.

A broken femur that has healed is evidence that someone has taken time to stay with the one who fell, has bound up the wound, has carried the person to safety and has tended the person through recovery.

Helping someone else through difficulty is where civilisation starts, Mead said."

We are at our best when we serve others.

Simply listening to someone's story can be the beginning of their healing.

Jesus bids us, " love one another, Just as I have loved you.

By this everyone will know that you are my disciples. (John 13: 34,35).

There is nothing we can do to make God love us more and nothing will cause God to love us less.

God's extravagant, unconditional love, that will never let us go, empowers us to love one another, and as we do that we make known a new way of being that can change the world, bringing wholeness and peace.

So let me ask you. How is your shalom today?

Amen

Revd Preb Julie Birkett