

Lent address 22 March 2020

Jesus's Healing Ministry.

The last two of these Lent addresses have focused on the means by which Jesus made disciples of those he had called to follow him, The first one by prayer, and the last one by his teaching and preaching. They are, if I may put it that way, intellectual ways, appealing to the minds of his hearers, but there also needed to be something else. It was one thing to tell people what they should be doing and how they should be behaving, but they needed to be shown in more practical ways too. The lawyer who wanted to know who was his neighbour was answered by the telling of the parable of the Good Samaritan, but I wonder if even that satisfied him. I would dare to presume that Jesus himself knew that something more than mere words were needed, a showing as well.

Jesus would be aware that because of his unique relationship with God that he possessed unique powers as well. Right from the beginning of his ministry he had used them, but always in response to a request or a genuine human need. There was no 'this'll show them who I am, they'll believe me now'. Neither the non-healing miracles nor the healing ones were done as a means to an end, however good the means or the end

were. They were not demonstrations of anything, other than of love in action, I don't believe there was any other motive. I don't think either Jesus was greatly bothered as to the reaction or response of the person healed. If there was a show of gratitude or thanksgiving, or a wish or intention to follow him, that would likely be welcomed and accepted. If there was no response, it would be all the same, Jesus would neither demand nor expect a fulsome show of gratitude.

There have been many attempts to rationalise away the healing miracles as not being miraculous or healing at all. There was no sickness, or if there was it was psychosomatic, all in the mind. Any cure was apparent rather than real, or a temporary remission. Any skin complaint was leprosy, and would go eventually. Perhaps there is an element of truth in many of these explanations, but I believe that, even if the lapse of time between the healings taking place and the recording of them in the gospels blurred the precise details, or they got conflated one with another, Jesus did heal people as described. Many years ago I remember preaching once about Jesus healing ministry and trying to draw a distinction between healing and curing. It might seem a bit like playing with semantics, and the two words are used as synonyms as verbs to convey the same meaning. Yet in many other respects the words are not. We do not for instance speak of the ministry of curing

but of healing. It suggests that the verb to heal has a larger and wider concept than the one to cure, and that to heal results in a cure. Does that mean however that a cure is not necessarily a restoration to health? If by healthy one means not physical and bodily wellbeing but that of the whole person, morally and spiritually as well, that could well be. If that is so then someone who is born with or later develops an incurable condition (MND for instance) can be healthier than someone in peak physical condition.

I don't somehow think that Jesus was concerned with such philosophical niceties, he saw a need and responded to it. At times that meant going beyond the physical manifestation of the problem to the inner cause. The paralysed man let down in his bed through the roof by his friends in the house where we are told Jesus was, was forgiven of whatever sin bothered him and told to take up his bed and walk. Not all of Jesus acts of healing were done quite so publicly or dramatically. Many I am sure were un-witnessed and unrecorded and entirely between himself and the person healed. At times we are told that he asked that they keep quiet about it and not broadcast it. Some of them, naturally I suppose, found that impossible to do and spread their good fortune to the four winds. Actions speak louder than words, but if belief can only come from what is seen or physically proved it is not true

belief. Jesus told doubting Thomas 'blessed are those who have not seen and have yet believed.' In the gospel accounts of his commission to 'go into all the world and preach the gospel and baptise', he said nothing about healing. It is if he saying 'heal where it is right to do so, but don't do it in order to gain followers'. In the book of Acts that is how it appeared it was done. Over the years it seems that in its wisdom the church has also in the main done this. Healing is not the prerogative of religions now, if ever was, and rightly so. Much of what is done in medicine now would seem miraculous to earlier generations. Having said that there are still cures and healings now that only be explained away by an intervention of some kind faith healing, prayer-who knows?