

Readings Our God, the healer and redeemer Foxton and Fowlmere

Psalm 103

Ephesians 3:1-10

Luke 5:18-25

Introduction

This is the first of five sermons David, Sonia and I will be preaching through June. Their aim is to introduce the whole subject of Prayer Ministry to our Church Families, to describe what it is, how God uses it in the life of his people and how we want to use it here in the Four Church benefice, especially as we have all been wounded and hurt during this past extraordinary year.

We will also be running a refresher course for those who have been involved in prayer ministry here in the past and for anyone who would like to join our team going forward. The plan is for us to begin holding regular healing services on a Sunday evening where people can come to meet with God and receive healing for physical and emotional issues we might be struggling with.

Prayer Ministry is one of the many forms of prayer and takes its place alongside Contemplative prayer, Confession, Thanksgiving and Intercession as one of the tools that God gives us in order to meet with him, join with him in his ministry, and to grow in our faith and wholeness.

Quite simply, Prayer Ministry is a way of praying for each other that is based on the belief that God is powerful and active, is interested in all our needs and wants to bring his power to bear in our lives through the Holy Spirit. In prayer ministry we pray for each other knowing that God is aware of our deepest needs, knows what he wants to do for us and is able to minister help and healing to us through the prayers of others and in the power of his Spirit.

This week I am going to set the scene for the rest of the series and outline the theology of Prayer Ministry, where we see that it is a ministry that springs directly from our understanding of who God is and how he wants to work in the lives of his people. Next week we will be looking at Jesus' ministry and see what we can learn from his approach. The third week we will see how the early church ministered powerfully and how Jesus gives the same commission to us that he gave to them. The final two sermons will talk about how we can learn to work alongside God in what he is doing and the wholeness that God desires for all his people.

We will only be fully whole in the next life but God longs for us to experience much more of his power and goodness in our lives than we often expect to receive from him. When we struggle with sin and pain and weakness it is often because we are not aware that God wants to

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work directly in our lives to deal with our problems and also because we have a low expectation of what he is able to do and wants to do for us.

It stands to reason that our expectation of what God can do and wants to do for his people springs directly from our understanding of who he is. If we believe him to be a cold distant figure who is keeping track of all our failings and tutting at our failures we will not be inclined to bring our weaknesses to him for his help and healing. On the other hand if we believe him to be a powerful, loving father who knows each of us by name and who cherishes our smallest effort to please him we will be much more likely to turn to him with our every need, and more than that we will do so expecting him to help.

So who is our God? What is he like? What is his character? How does he relate to his people and what does he want for us? There is no better place to start in answering these questions than Psalm 103 which gives a clear and comprehensive portrait of God and which shows him active in individual lives. If I cover every thing the psalm teaches us about God and what he wants for us we will be here for a very long time. As I didn't warn you to bring your sleeping bags and Thermos Flasks I will concentrate on the first eight verses and leave you to read the rest at your leisure. It is well worth doing and encourages us to expect a great deal more from our God than we often dream of asking. The silly, and sad thing is that God is longing to do much more for us but because he is also polite he doesn't force himself on us and only does those things we give him permission to do.

Read verse 1-8

Our God is the powerful, holy creator.

God has created us and by his power called the whole universe into being. He has made us and sustains all life. But he is not only powerful he is Holy. His very nature, summed up by his name is holiness. He is flawless, perfect and has made us in his image to be perfect too. - Which is where the trouble starts because we are far from flawless. We are not only not perfect but find in ourselves something that means that by ourselves we are unable to be perfect. Verses three and four sum up our problem. We are sinful, diseased and heading for destruction. God made us and chose us to be close to him but our nature is disobedient and wilful. From the very beginning of the world mankind chose to go his own way and ignore God and in our weakness and disobedience we are unable to come close to our Holy creator.

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So God has taken the initiative and made it possible for us to come close to him:

He forgives all our sins.

Paul in his letter to the Ephesians describes how, even before the creation of the world God had chosen us to be holy and blameless in his sight. How in love he predestined us to be adopted as his children through Jesus Christ. God in his wisdom knew that mankind would reject his love and turn away from him to pursue our own interest and priorities, mostly sinful and selfish. Yet he wasn't prepared to give up on us. He was determined that we would be holy and blameless in his sight, that we would be his children. Paul describes it as being God' pleasure and will. It pleases him to have us close to him and in his great goodness he made it possible.

Because we are sinful and unable to please him by ourselves God offers us free and full forgiveness through his Son Jesus Christ who died on the cross for each and every sin and failure of each and every one of us. He offers us full and perfect forgiveness so that we are holy and blameless in his sight. The psalmist didn't say "he forgives most of my sins", or "he forgives all my sins except the worst ones" He said, "He forgives all your sins" When Christ died for us on the cross he gained for us free and total forgiveness of every single sin. Each time we have turned away from God, every time we have hurt him and others, all our failings and failures have been brought to Calvary and there we are granted total forgiveness. All we have to do is accept that Christ has died on our behalf and ask for God's forgiveness. We are chosen to be holy and blameless children - and Christ has made it possible.

He heals all our diseases

Most of us can relate fairly well to the fact that we have received forgiveness from our sins, though many of us still feel guilty failures and we certainly haven't totally conquered the power of sin in our lives. But we do find it harder to relate to the fact that God wants to heal us physically as well. If we think about it for a minute it stands to reason that he should because he created us sinless and free from disease. It wasn't until mankind chose to disobey God and go their own way that pain and suffering entered the world. At the present time the world is under Satan's rule and the evidence of that is not only in our sinfulness but in our pain and weakness as well.

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When Jesus came to earth he proclaimed that God's Kingdom has come and in his teaching and by his ministry he showed that God was re-establishing his rule on earth. We will talk more fully about Jesus' ministry next week but it is worth noting that in the gospels there is no record of him turning any one away or failing to heal when asked to do so. He didn't heal everyone, true but his power to heal is clearly seen. Even in Old Testament times we see God bringing healing to individuals. Clearly all illness and disease will not be healed until Christ comes in glory to re-establish his power on earth but he does offer us healing today and where we have the courage and faith to seek his help God does heal. He has healed through history and as he led the Hebrew people through the desert to the promised land we read this promise. *Read Exodus 15:25-27* This passage shows us that God does work to heal and also shows that there is some relationship between sin and illness. We will be exploring that in a later sermon.

He redeems our lives from the pit.

God not only offers us forgiveness and healing but he also rescues us from eternal destruction and gives us the free gift of eternal life because of all that Jesus has won for us on the cross. He also crowns all these blessings with his love and compassion. God not only loves us more than we can begin to imagine but, having created us he also understands us to the depths of our being. He knows and understands all our weaknesses, our failure, our needs, our hopes and dreams. He has compassion on us. He never treats us as we deserve but offers us love and understanding at every turn. He understands deeply what it means to feel sorrow, loss, rejection, failure and weakness and he wants to be there in the midst of our suffering offering his love and support.

If only we had the humility to confess our needs to God and the faith to bring every one of our concerns to him we would know much more of his power and strength in our lives. He satisfies our desires in a way that no one and nothing else can. He is a righteous God who bring justice to those who are oppressed and ill treated. He is the one who took the initiative making himself known to Moses and leading his people out of slavery. He knows each of us by name and he wants to be involved with us individually and as his family the church. He never barges in but is there waiting for us to call on him and as a child with their father climb onto his knee and bring all our concerns to him. This is the God who has created us, called us, and offers us forgiveness, healing and eternal life.

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We will be thinking more next week about the practical ways in which our God meets with his people and brings his gracious compassion to bear on our lives.