

**Introduction**

This is the fifth and final sermon in our series thinking about the power of the Holy Spirit to transform and heal us.

If we were to produce a manifesto for the healing ministry we could do worse than to look to Paul's words to the church in Thesalonica. He says this: " May the God who gives us peace make you holy in every way and keep your whole being - spirit, soul and body - free from every fault at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you will do it because he is faithful." God's plan for us is that we should be whole and healthy in every way - the complete people that he made us to be. That includes physical, spiritual and emotional well-being, harmony, peace, joy, and faith. Most of us would look at that list and admit that there are areas where we are far from whole.

I've talked in an earlier sermon about the fact that we have often been content to settle for less than the best. We have come to terms with the fact that we continually struggle with sin and failure and have set our sights for ourselves and for others to an achievable level - which is way below the standard God has set for us and way below the wholeness and freedom he wants for each of us. If we have the courage to open our hearts and lives fully to him our God can transform us emotionally, spiritually and physically. He may not give me the perfect figure but he can deal with some of the effects of dis-ease in my life.

There has been, through the ages, and still is today a fairly widespread perception that there is a link between sin and illness. How many times do we hear the question "What have I done to deserve this?" I know for myself when I first became chronically ill nearly forty years ago I spent about three months carefully examining my heart and mind trying to work out if I had committed some terrible sin or offended God in some way. In the end I came to the conclusion that there was no root cause: no un-confessed sin, no offence against God.

It was fortunate that I had examined myself because not long after that I got a letter from my step mother saying that I would never be healed until I had repented of leaving the catholic church and becoming an Anglican. I was able to tell her that my conscience was entirely clear. But that was a very difficult and confusing time for me. Many of us feel there is a link between sin and illness and we look for causes for our ill health.

This goes back to the legacy of the Old Testament

**1 Thessalonians 5:12-24**

**Luke 5:17-26**

When the Israelites settled down as a community, rules were devised for public health and hygiene. (e.g. Leviticus 11-15) There was a strong awareness of the corporate responsibility for the health of the community. Rules about food, infectious diseases, damp housing were all carefully spelt out, as were many other matters concerning cleanliness and public health. (*Note how there is a parallelism between infectious skin diseases, and diseases of the fabric of homes i.e. mildew and dry rot.*)

There were three spin-offs from this:

1. Power to the professional priesthood (who acted rather like public officers of health)
2. A strong link between sickness and sin. People believed that if you were sick it was because in some way or other you had sinned. (*There are actually clear instances recorded in the Bible when God did punish sin by inflicting a disease or illness on people; Numbers 12, Exodus 32:31-35*)
3. The inevitable isolation of the sick. This isolation of those who were sick ( i.e special colonies for lepers) was a public health precaution. And is something that we have currently become very familiar with

In the Gospels we see Jesus dealing with this question about the relationship between sin and ill health. In John chapter 9 he is asked what a blind man or his parents had done to cause his blindness. Jesus said nothing "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life". He's not saying that God inflicted the man with blindness so that he could show his power by healing him. What I think he means is that illness and infirmity of body, mind or spirit are a direct result of the fallen state of mankind. Our disobedience and rejection of God and his plans for us mean that we all carry the effects either, physically spiritually or emotionally - often all three and God can, if we allow him to, transform our situation by bringing healing to us. In that particular situation the outcome was that as well as receiving his sight the man came to faith in Jesus as his Lord and so he received physical and spiritual healing. On other occasions Jesus tells people who come to him for healing that they are forgiven, he also on occasion warns them to sin no more. So there clearly is a link between sin and illness though just because I am ill does not necessarily mean that it is punishment for sin.

One of our greatest needs, whether we admit it or not is for forgiveness and lack of forgiveness in our lives for ourselves or for others can often be a source of 'dis ease' and stress.

**The need for forgiveness**

Forgiveness means that we:

## Readings      Wholeness. Sin and Forgiveness      Fowlmere/Foxton

### 1 Thessalonians 5:12-24

### Luke 5:17-26

- Stop feeling resentment against someone who has hurt us.
- Cancel a person's record with us and transfer the responsibility for any punishment to God.

### Reasons why we should forgive

- Because in Christ God forgave us and restored our relationship with him (Eph. 4:32)
- Because Jesus taught that we must forgive (Matthew 18 - see also the Lord's Prayer)
- Because forgiveness helps us to be like Jesus.
- Because forgiveness restores the present, heals for the future, releases from the past. - *(Lack of forgiveness and bitterness have been shown to be at the root of some physical illnesses such as Arthritis and Cancer [disease which is related to our immune system], in addition to the effect it has upon our spiritual and emotional health)*
- Because forgiveness enables us to empty our hearts of hatred.
- Because forgiveness opens us to Jesus' power to heal us.

### Forgiveness when we have sinned

If we are aware that we have sinned against God or someone else then we need to acknowledge and confess that sin to God - maybe in the presence of someone else.

We then need to consciously make a decision to turn away from the behaviour attitudes and choices which have been sinful and then we can receive the forgiveness and cleansing which flows from the cross

### Forgiveness when we have been sinned against

If someone has hurt us God tells us we need to forgive them – that can be extremely difficult. But what we need to do is first to ask God (by his Holy Spirit ) to show us the root of the hurt. What was it about the incident that hurt us so much? Tell God about your pain and hurt.

Decide to forgive the person for the action and the attitude that caused the hurt. That can be very difficult and we might first of all need to ask God to make us willing to forgive *(my own experience with Elizabeth)*

Ask God to forgive the person for the hurt he/she caused. *Note they may well not acknowledge any responsibility -Elizabeth*

Ask God to forgive you for the sin of bitterness, anger etc.

Ask God to bless the person and whenever you think of them again ask him to bless them, even in their absence.

Ask the Holy Spirit to come and heal the hurt.

Even if the person is dead forgive them. What is released in heaven is released on earth.

**Results of forgiveness**

When we learn to forgive those who have hurt us we find that we become healed physically, mentally and in our relationships with others. The results of the hurt and pain stop echoing in our lives.

**The Biblical basis for inner healing**

Jesus said: "Peace is what I leave with you: it is my own peace I give you. I do not give it as the world does. Do not be worried and upset; do not be afraid" (John 14:27) An important part of the salvation Jesus came to teach and demonstrate was SHALOM=PEACE, or wholeness, harmony at every level. This peace comes from the experience of sins forgiven, and of a right relationship with God that comes from genuine repentance and real commitment to Jesus Christ. It comes also as fear and anxiety are driven from us: it comes when our inner burdens are taken by God, when self-hate and despair are replaced by God with thoughts that are 'good and true and holy'. God is love and his concern is for our healing (Ex 15:26). Salvation is about wholeness and healing which can touch our bodies, minds and spirits. It is about the 'peace of God which passes all understanding guarding our hearts and minds through Christ Jesus' (Phil 4:7)

What we want to do as we begin to have regular healing services in the benefice is to give ourselves the opportunity to come to God for him to work in our lives. To ask him to deal with the things that we struggle with whether they are physical illness, emotional problems, a situation in our lives we don't know how to deal with, help at work or at home. We want to come confident that God knows about our needs, is entirely able to deal with them and wants to meet with us powerfully at our point of difficulty. He knows most what we need and if we come to him seeking help he will answer our prayers. What he does for us may not be what we had top of our list but it will certainly be what God knows we need most at this point. So let's trust him to act in our lives and come confidently to him.