**October 2022 *Wholeness and Healing***

Welcome to the October Prayer, and the second in a series of 12. Each month we will explore different themes and different ways of praying which we hope you will find helpful as ways in which to encounter God. *The Provincial Spirituality Group in the Church in Wales.*

**Introduction**

This month’s theme is healing and wholeness. Our prayer for this month isn’t one specific way of praying but various ways of praying for healing, wholeness, true well-being.

Healing and wholeness involve more than physical health. The World Health Organisation defines health as, ‘a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity’. (Although this definition is, perhaps, an ideal rather than a daily reality).

The World Health definition highlights the fact that to be truly whole includes all that we are - body, mind and spirit. It is more than just physical health. It also highlights the importance of relationships. Human beings live in community with one another and so wholeness involves having rich and satisfying relationships. This means that healing can involve reconciliation - the healing of relationships. Christians believe that human beings are made to live in relationship with God as well as with one another, so wholeness includes being in a good relationship with God.

Healing was a central part of the ministry of Jesus. He not only healed people physically but taught us ways of healing relationships through loving actions, through forgiveness and mercy.

**Prayer**

Gentle God,

our bodies fail,

our minds are troubled,

our relationships are broken.

We long to be whole.

Please reach out and touch us

as we reach out to you

so that we might be made well.

In Jesus name.

Amen

**Reflection.**

The theme of healing is a difficult one and needs treating with care. We can’t speak of healing and wholeness without facing the reality of suffering. So many people live with conditions which cause them physical pain or which seriously restrict their lives. Mental health issues cause great distress, sometimes leading to despair. An accident can cause life-changing injuries in an instant. Conditions such as childlessness can cause hidden anguish. Our bodies and minds are vulnerable.

Suffering comes to people who do their best to live good and loving lives, as well as to people who do deliberate harm to others. When a tower fell down, killing eighteen people, Jesus pointed out that the people who died were no worse than anyone else living in Jerusalem at the time (Luke 13.4). Similarly, God ‘makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the righteous and on the unrighteous’ (Matthew 5.45). For many people, the existence of such great suffering, and the unfairness of it, are a serious barrier to believing in God. This is an issue which theologians have wrestled with for generations.

Care is also needed in linking healing too directly with faith so as to imply that if only someone has enough faith they will be cured. We certainly see that people are cured by Jesus in the gospels and often, although not always, this is linked to faith. But we also see people who live with ongoing health issues despite their great faith. St. Paul’s ‘thorn in the flesh’ (2 Corinthians 6-7) is thought to be a physical affliction; Timothy is told to take wine because of his stomach problems and other ailments (1 Timothy 5.23). In whatever way prayer ‘works’, it’s not as simple as praying for something and always getting exactly what we have asked for. If we suggest that it is, then we can cause further suffering by making people feel guilty that they have not been healed in the way that they might have hoped.

On the other hand, many, many people can testify to the healing power of God. Sometimes (rarely) this is through a miraculous cure, more often it is through the work of others (such as doctors, nurses or the gentle care of family). Sometimes healing comes through a change of perspective in the person praying - such as when we realise that rather than praying for a person with a learning disability to be ‘healed’, ***we*** need God’s touch to help ***us*** welcome and value them as they are. We may also experience strength, encouragement, or comfort as result of prayer even though our external situation remains the same. Many of us know people with an ‘affliction’ who are holy, inspiring, whole people.

It may sound an odd thing to say, but the final healing from a Christian perspective is death. Or, to be more accurate, resurrection. Our hope that we will find a new life beyond this one, comes from the resurrection of Jesus. Even after death, Jesus still had the wounds inflicted on him in life (the marks of the nails and spear from his crucifixion) but was no longer suffering. He was made whole in a new and remarkable way and entered eternal life. And he told his disciples that he was going to prepare a place for them to be with him (John 14.1-6).

**Bible Passage**

This Bible passage in which Jesus heals ten lepers is a helpful story to ponder as we think about healing:

‘On the way to Jerusalem Jesus was going through the region between Samaria and Galilee. As he entered a village, ten lepers approached him. Keeping their distance, they called out, saying, ‘Jesus, Master, have mercy on us!’ When he saw them, he said to them, ‘Go and show yourselves to the priests.’ And as they went, they were made clean. Then one of them, when he saw that he was healed, turned back, praising God with a loud voice. He prostrated himself at Jesus’ feet and thanked him. And he was a Samaritan.

Then Jesus asked, ‘Were not ten made clean? But the other nine, where are they? Was none of them found to return and give praise to God except this foreigner?’ Then he said to him, ‘Get up and go on your way; your faith has made you well.’ (Luke 17.11-19).

*As you read this passage, you might prayerfully reflect on these questions:*

At the beginning of the story there is a distance between Jesus and the lepers. *Place yourself in the position of a leper and ponder - what might be keeping you distant from Jesus?*

Why do the lepers call for ‘mercy’? *What would your cry be?*

*What do you think is the difference between being made ‘clean’, which all ten experienced, and being made ‘well’ which only one experienced?*

The one leper who returns praises God and thanks Jesus. *How might you respond in a similar way?*

**Prayer of the Month: For Healing and Well-Being**

There is no one way of praying for healing but here are some possibilities for personal healing of body, mind or spirit:

***Writing your own prayer*** - using the passage above

Take some of your responses to the passage above and turn them into prayer
Cry out to Jesus as the lepers did but with your own individual cry, acknowledging your need.
Praise God and thank Jesus for what you have received.

***Attending a service of healing***

Many churches have specific services which include prayers for healing. You may like to attend one. Even if there is no specific service of healing you can go to a Eucharist service at your local church (sometimes known as a service of holy communion). This service includes a re-telling and re-living of the healing acts of Jesus as he gives his disciples tokens of his forthcoming death in bread and wine. We hear too of his resurrection which overcame death and makes us whole. As you go to receive communion (or a personal blessing) you can pray for the healing you need in your own words or in words similar to these:

Compassionate God I trust in you and ask for healing in the name of your son Jesus. Amen

Prayer for healing our relationship with God and with others:

***‘Confession’ and Reconciliation***

The Eucharist gives us an opportunity to heal our relationship with God and with other people. Early in the service we admit to our sins (all those actions, words and thoughts which have been unloving) in the ‘confession’ and the priest speaks words which reassure us that we are forgiven and made whole.

It is also possible to arrange to make an individual confession (the sacrament of reconciliation) to God in the presence of a priest and hear words of forgiveness given to us personally. This can greatly help the healing of our relationship with God and others. Talk to your local priest if you would like to know more about this.

**Concluding Reflection**

We embrace true wholeness when we are able to accept our brokenness and to allow God to deal with the things in ourselves that are imperfect. By developing our self-awareness and our need to bring to God what needs healing within us, we are able to walk along the path to wholeness.

**Additional resources:**

*Scripture:*Healing of the nations (Ezekiel 47.1-12)
A woman is healed (Mark 5.24b-34)
Do you want to be made well? (John 5.1-9)

*Music to listen to or sing:*

‘For the healing of the nations’
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QXtfIE6jSYQ>

‘Lay your hands gently upon us’
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VHQBVvGw\_2Y

*Prayers from the Church of England:*https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/topical-prayers/prayers-personal-situations

**Next Month**

We hope that you have found these reflections and prayers helpful, and they may of course need thinking about and praying more than once. Next month our theme and prayers will be about remembering and letting go.