

## **Advent Course – Heal the sick**

We are revisiting stories we may have heard from our early days, from school, Sunday school or from hearing them at church on Sundays. Some of these stories may be very familiar to you.

It is often true that familiar things can lose their impact and their freshness and that their meaning can be toned down over time.

For example, if you were asked “What happened in the story of the ten lepers or the woman who touched Jesus’ cloak?”, you might respond with the fact that only one leper came back to thank Jesus, and Jesus had said. “Who touched me?” We will look again at these and other stories of Jesus and his disciples over the next few weeks.

Our aim this Advent is to get to know some of these stories a little better (they are too numerous for all of them to be covered in detail) and to challenge ourselves on whether this ministry of Jesus is valid today.

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## Sunday

### Matthew 10:1-8

Jesus called together his twelve disciples. He gave them the power to force out evil spirits and to heal every kind of disease and sickness. The first of the twelve apostles was Simon, better known as Peter. His brother Andrew was an apostle, and so were James and John, the two sons of Zebedee. Philip, Bartholomew, Thomas, Matthew the tax collector, James the son of Alphaeus, and Thaddaeus were also apostles. The others were Simon, known as the Eager One, and Judas Iscariot, who later betrayed Jesus.

Jesus sent out the twelve apostles with these instructions: Stay away from the Gentiles and don't go to any Samaritan town. Go only to the people of Israel, because they are like a flock of lost sheep. As you go, announce that the kingdom of heaven will soon be here.

Heal the sick, raise the dead to life, heal people who have leprosy, and force out demons. You received without paying, now give without being paid.

Jesus has gathered his twelve close followers in order to give them their first task. "Go and do what you've already seen me doing". If we look back through Matthew's gospel we will see examples of each of the four things Jesus is now asking his disciples to do.

It would be good if we were to memorise Jesus' four-fold command to heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse the lepers and drive out demons. A minister writes about the first of these:

*I had this voice in me saying 'heal the sick, heal the sick' but it's not something they teach you at University! We saw that people began to be healed of medically incurable things as they prayed. We met a young housewife who had terminal bowel cancer, and had a short time to live. One day she said 'will you pray for me to be healed?' I arranged to pray with her a few days later, and she was healed. In this small church in Luton, people began praying for one another and astonishing things were happening, often without my involvement.*

<http://www.aahorsham.co.uk/content/colinurquhart>

Judas Iscariot may have wondered how this was going to be funded, but Simon Eager could hardly wait to get out there. We'll explore over the next few days these four areas of ministry that Jesus describes by first showing Jesus doing them himself.

**Was this commissioning of the disciples just for this one task only?**

**"He gave them power" - what sort of power is it that achieves these things?**

**What do people in our small church need to do to see astonishing things happen?**

***Father God, I pray that you will open my heart to the truth about the work that Jesus did on earth. I place my trust in your mercy and kindness to me. Amen.***

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## Monday

### Leviticus 13:1-6

The LORD told Moses and Aaron to say to the people: If sores or boils or a skin rash should break out and start spreading on your body, you must be brought to Aaron or to one of the other priests.

If the priest discovers that the hair in the infected area has turned white and that the infection seems more than skin deep, he will say, "This is leprosy --you are unclean." But if the infected area is white and only skin deep, and if the hair in it hasn't turned white, the priest will order you to stay away from everyone else for seven days.

If the disease hasn't spread by that time, he will order you to stay away from everyone else for another seven days. Then if the disease hasn't got any worse or spread, the priest will say, "You are clean. It was only a sore. After you wash your clothes, you may go home."

Leprosy was a disease that made the sufferer unclean – its incurable and progressive nature, together with the (actually, quite low) risk of its spreading to others meant that the sufferer had to be kept away from society. As such it was a terrible disease.

The priests acted as disease control. People had to come to them to be inspected and the priest would be charged to declare a person clean or unclean, included or excluded. God provided clear instructions that the priest could follow, and only a priest could declare a person unclean or unclean.

There were other conditions apart from leprosy that also led to uncleanness – try curling up with Leviticus from this reading up to the end of chapter 15. You'll curl up all right.

**If God was so particular about this disease why did he allow it?**

**Where did it come from?**

**What might make you unclean before God?**

***Father God, there are things in me that I need to bring before you, but I would prefer to hide and pretend it's all OK rather than seek your grace and your mercy. Help me understand that in Jesus I have cleansing and forgiveness.***

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## Tuesday

### Matthew 8:1-4

As Jesus came down the mountain, he was followed by large crowds. Suddenly a man with leprosy came and knelt in front of Jesus. He said, "Lord, you have the power to make me well, if only you wanted to." Jesus put his hand on the man and said, "I want to! Now you are well." At once the man's leprosy disappeared.

Jesus told him, "Don't tell anyone about this, but go and show the priest that you are well. Then take a gift to the temple just as Moses commanded, and everyone will know that you have been healed."

Over the course of our study I'd like you to think around the passages and try to look at them in a different way. I'd dare to say that if you read a passage again at a later date that your thoughts and responses to it should not be the same as when you read it previously. Our growth in Christ, our depth of experience and understanding and our continued reading of the Bible in the meantime will bring fresh revelations. Scripture is dynamic – it is God-inspired: God breathes through it.

A man just puts himself in Jesus' way. He's not allowed to do that, of course, but he does. It's an ambush. The crowds following Jesus may be backing off a little when they see him, but Jesus does not. I'm trying to imagine the boldness of the man – Jesus had certainly healed many people, but lepers lived apart and may not have seen what Jesus was doing, though I am sure stories travelled fast even among the outcast communities.

The AV words *If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean* I remember from Sunday School. The translation above to me has the edge, as the old one left me thinking that Jesus might not want to cleanse the man. Did Jesus ever refuse anyone?

**When did you last put yourself in front of Jesus for cleansing or healing?**

**Have you ever chosen to stay away from Jesus because you consider yourself unclean before him?**

**Well, did Jesus ever refuse anyone?**

***Father God, the most dangerous place I could ever be is on my knees before the You, the King of Kings. I kneel before you and acknowledge that only You can make me clean in your sight. Amen.***

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## Wednesday

### Matthew 8:14-15

Jesus went to the home of Peter, where he found that Peter's mother-in-law was sick in bed with fever. He took her by the hand, and the fever left her. Then she got up and served Jesus a meal.

A fever could pass, I suppose. Keep the sufferer cool with damp cloths and let the fever follow its course. Why bother Jesus with this minor situation when there are plenty more important things, and far worse illnesses and conditions to deal with? But Jesus was a guest in Peter's house, and his wife's mother was unwell. What does Jesus do? He takes her by the hand. He doesn't hold her hand in a comforting gesture. The way I read this is that Jesus is already beckoning this woman up from her bed.

We should look to the ordering and timing of the steps that take place when Jesus heals a person. The man with leprosy was healed when Jesus touched him. He'd first revealed his unshakeable faith in Jesus' ability to cleanse him, on the ground kneeling before Jesus.

Sometimes the account does not reveal everything. Peter's mother is not reported as having faith. She gets up after the fever left her, but Jesus had taken her by the hand and we'd imagine that she did not pull her hand away. Perhaps she had lifted herself from her bed. Whatever happened, the fever still left her.

**What do you consider too minor for Jesus to treat?**

**Have you ever retracted your hand from Jesus?**

***Father God, your Son Jesus took the woman by the hand and she was made well. Reach out to me in him, and I will put my hand in his, not for comfort but for healing. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

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## Thursday

### Matthew 8:28-34

After Jesus had crossed the lake, he came to shore near the town of Gadara and started down the road. Two men with demons in them came to him from the tombs. They were so fierce that no one could travel that way. Suddenly they shouted, "Jesus, Son of God, what do you want with us? Have you come to punish us before our time?"

Not far from there a large herd of pigs was feeding. So the demons begged Jesus, "If you force us out, please send us into those pigs!" Jesus told them to go, and they went out of the men and into the pigs. All at once the pigs rushed down the steep bank into the lake and drowned.

The people taking care of the pigs ran to the town and told everything, especially what had happened to the two men. Everyone in town came out to meet Jesus. When they saw him, they begged him to leave their part of the country.

Mark has a story of a single man in a similar condition. The gospels share some stories and they might differ a little from each other as the writer puts his outlook or purpose for writing into the wording. It is good, however, to realise that "differences" arise, and we should seek to be comfortable with that.

What Jesus heard was not the words of the two men shouting. They were shouting the words, but the words did not come from them. They came from that which was possessing them. The amazing thing we can sometimes lose focus on is that the demons were terrified. They were already submissive to Jesus, and Jesus has not yet said or done anything.

These two men had been a danger to people travelling that way, and no-one could tackle them. There were *two* trolls under the bridge. They were also two men whose bodies and personalities had been totally taken over and whose minds were in torment. Today they'd get padded cells and drug cocktails.

Jesus comes along. Did he know they were there, or did he just come across them? It doesn't really matter.

The pigs episode – why? Well, why not? And I can't care what happened to the demons after the pigs drowned.

This exorcism stuff sounds a bit like Hollywood films. But it's not. Jesus had the authority over these creatures and he exercised it. There was no ritual, no drops in temperature, no fighting back or spinning heads. Jesus commanded and they were gone. Don't watch horror films – read your Bible instead.

**Did the pigs deserve that?**

**Did the pig owners deserve that?**

**Why didn't the demons run away instead? Wouldn't that have saved a herd of pigs?**

***Father God, take me to the truth of this passage. Help me understand the spiritual nature of evil so that I may recognise its source and know who has the authority over it, in whose name I pray. Amen.***

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## Friday

### Matthew 9:18-26

While Jesus was still speaking, an official came and knelt in front of him. The man said, "My daughter has just now died! Please come and place your hand on her. Then she will live again." Jesus and his disciples got up and went with the man.

...

When Jesus went into the home of the official and saw the musicians and the crowd of mourners, he said, "Get out of here! The little girl isn't dead. She is just asleep." Everyone started laughing at Jesus.

But after the crowd had been sent out of the house, Jesus went to the girl's bedside. He took her by the hand and helped her up. News about this spread all over that part of the country.

The official (Jairus in Mark's and Luke's account) came to Jesus with a proposition, a deal. Admittedly this deal seemed a bit one-sided: Jesus, you come to my house, you place your hand on my daughter and she'll get better. In Matthew's story she was already dead. The official was of course begging Jesus for help. But it wasn't all one-sided. He had come and knelt before Jesus. A respectable man would not have left his house when his daughter died.

Coming to Jesus in itself was enough. The words the official spoke are unimportant and they would not in themselves necessarily persuade Jesus. He had placed faith in what Jesus could do over his expected duty to family. He did not sit at home and say "The Master will not trouble to come back to my house". Might his wife have chided him for leaving the house?

His act of faith was carried out in coming before Jesus. His words echoed that faith. Jesus stopped talking to the assembled company and went with him. The company went along, too. When they saw the hired mourners the realisation dawned on many of them that the girl was dead, and that was it. Not Jesus, though. Mourners never get told their services are suddenly no longer required. Dead is dead. They (I?) would have laughed at the idea that the child was only sleeping. They went, and they never got to see the child brought back to life.

Matthew has now recorded Jesus as having done all the things he was authorising his disciples to do.

**Would Jesus have gone to the house if a neighbour had come instead?**

**Will Jesus heal my headache, for it is a bit much to ask this of the Great Healer?**

**Does my faith stop where common sense takes over?**

***Father God, I want the faith of that father, who would not accept what others took as finality and failure and brought himself to Jesus for a miracle.. Amen.***

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## Saturday

### Luke 4:16-21

Jesus went back to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and as usual he went to the meeting place on the Sabbath. When he stood up to read from the Scriptures, he was given the book of Isaiah the prophet. He opened it and read,

"The Lord's Spirit has come to me, because he has chosen me to tell the good news to the poor. The Lord has sent me to announce freedom for prisoners, to give sight to the blind, to free everyone who suffers, and to say, 'This is the year the Lord has chosen.' "

Jesus closed the book, then handed it back to the man in charge and sat down. Everyone in the meeting place looked straight at Jesus.

Then Jesus said to them, "What you have just heard me read has come true today."

We go back to the start of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' manifesto. I love the drama of this account. I wonder how long the people in the synagogue waited before Jesus spoke. I wonder what they were already beginning to think about him – read the 2 verses before this passage to put it into context.

Jesus takes the ancient words of prophecy given to Isaiah and ascribes them to himself. This prophecy is about me, says Jesus. Yes, me. It's enough to get members of the congregation to write an indignant letter to the bishop, if only they had bishops then. So they did the next best thing and tried to throw Jesus over a cliff. What a start to Jesus' ministry. He'd lived quietly for thirty years. He came forward for baptism by his cousin John. The Holy Spirit confirmed and God spoke. Jesus battled with and took the upper hand over Satan. Great spiritual experiences. And now he comes to the likes of you and me and he's nearly killed.

God preserved him for his ministry. Someone good came out of Nazareth.

**Has our Church ever stifled the truth?**

**Am I prepared to be challenged in my Christian thinking?**

**Do I prefer what I know and love?**

***Father, teach me to love what you love, to worship you as you command us to worship you – in spirit and in truth. Amen.***

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## Sunday

### Matthew 11:1-5

After Jesus had finished instructing his twelve disciples, he left and began teaching and preaching in the towns. John was in prison when he heard what Christ was doing. So John sent some of his followers to ask Jesus, "Are you the one we should be looking for? Or must we wait for someone else?"

Jesus answered, "Go and tell John what you have heard and seen. The blind are now able to see, and the lame can walk. People with leprosy are being healed, and the deaf can hear. The dead are raised to life, and the poor are hearing the good news.

Jesus reminds John's followers that they might care to open their eyes. They'd asked if he was the One. Jesus returns to his manifesto and tells them that they have already seen him give sight to the blind, and many other amazing things too.

It's amazing that when we go searching we might start laying down restrictions. John's disciples thought that the way to find out if Jesus was the One was to go up to him and ask him. Seems like a good approach, but it's not going to work. Jesus is never going to tell anyone what or how to think in matters like this. Jesus challenges these men to come to their own conclusions about him, using the evidence before them. They had not connected what they saw to who had made it happen.

Those who accused him at his arrest wanted him to say it, but they were seeking something else.

They said, "Tell us! Are you the Messiah?" Jesus replied, "If I said so, you wouldn't believe me. And if I asked you a question, you wouldn't answer. But from now on, the Son of Man will be seated at the right side of God All-Powerful." Then they asked, "Are you the Son of God?" Jesus answered, "You say I am!" They replied, "Why do we need more witnesses? He said it himself!"

**Is Jesus the One you are still seeking?**

**Have you shaped Jesus into what you want?**

**Has Jesus met your expectations?**

***Father God, I want to see the evidence. It has probably stared me in the face so often but I am blind to it. Open my eyes not only to look but to see, my ears not only to hear but to listen. Perhaps I have to become like the man who came to Jesus for healing. Father God, I believe. Help my unbelief. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

## Monday

### Matthew 4:23-25

Jesus went all over Galilee, teaching in the Jewish meeting places and preaching the good news about God's kingdom. He also healed every kind of disease and sickness.

News about him spread all over Syria, and people with every kind of sickness or disease were brought to him. Some of them had a lot of demons in them, others were thought to be crazy, and still others could not walk. But Jesus healed them all.

Large crowds followed Jesus from Galilee and the region around the ten cities known as Decapolis. They also came from Jerusalem, Judea, and from across the Jordan River.

News travels fast. You might think that this largely rural society had rudimentary communications, but I would dare to suggest that news about Jesus shot along the trade routes and the grazing tracks. We may be talking days rather than hours, but people turned up in droves when Jesus arrived.

Imagine life in a family that has a sick person to care for. Perhaps there's a "crazy" one, who just doesn't operate in the same way as everyone else. Imagine a child born with legs that cannot carry him, or eyes that are useless. Add to that the religious accusation that the child may be disabled due to the sins of the parents. Wouldn't you go to Jesus?

From the outset Jesus is followed by large crowds of people. It wasn't just for his preaching and teaching that they came – it's likely that they (and the disciples, too!) didn't always understand what Jesus was talking about. I'm sure that 5000 people were glad to eat bread and fish, but when the village cripple is touched by Jesus and he is instantly healed, that's when eyes and ears turn to Jesus.

**Do you believe that Jesus actually did what the Bible says he did?**

**Did he ever run out of power?**

**Was this work reserved for Jesus alone?**

***Father God, your son Jesus preached and taught with power and authority because he put his healing hands where his mouth was. I want to live and move and have my being in his power and authority. Amen.***

## Tuesday

### Matthew 8:16-17

That evening many people with demons in them were brought to Jesus. And with only a word he forced out the evil spirits and healed everyone who was sick. So God's promise came true, just as the prophet Isaiah had said, "He healed our diseases and made us well."

### Mark 1:32-34

That evening after sunset, all who were sick or had demons in them were brought to Jesus. In fact, the whole town gathered around the door of the house. Jesus healed all kinds of terrible diseases and forced out a lot of demons. But the demons knew who he was, and he did not let them speak.

### Luke 4:40-41

After the sun had set, people with all kinds of diseases were brought to Jesus. He put his hands on each one of them and healed them. Demons went out of many people and shouted, "You are the Son of God!" But Jesus ordered the demons not to speak because they knew he was the Messiah.

Three accounts of what happened after Simon's mother-in-law was healed. Who let that story out?! Or were the crowds already there, following Jesus wherever he went? The accounts talk of sickness and demons. It would be easy to dismiss the demon thing by saying that these were examples of mental illness which might be defined in modern terms as delusions, bipolar conditions, psychosis and the like, were it not for the fact that the "demons" recognised Jesus for who he was – "You are the Son of God". This is recounted many times in the gospels and I don't think it's some form of mass hysteria.

The demons recognised who Jesus was way before some of his closest companions did.

Remember too that they were driven out – the sufferers were cleansed. Even if this was a psychological illness then Jesus healed that, too! Modern treatments for mental illness are improving continually but still do not have this sort of success rate. Call it what you will, but Jesus dealt with it.

It's not easy to imagine ourselves in that world at that time. Disease of any type was debilitating, shameful, burdensome on the family and largely incurable. People would be longing for a cure. When Jesus proclaimed the Kingdom of Heaven, he taught it, he preached it, but also demonstrated it in miracles, healings and cleansings.

**Is it foolish to think about diseases today in the same way Jesus saw them?**

**Is it possible that there are other forces at work in some forms of mental illness?**

**Is it possible to believe that Jesus can heal "all kinds of diseases" today?**

***Father God, open my mind and my heart to the possibility that Jesus may still be at work today through his Holy Spirit in us. Challenge the boundaries of my faith by revealing the true Kingdom of Heaven in me. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

## Wednesday

### Matthew 15:29-31

From there, Jesus went along Lake Galilee. Then he climbed a hill and sat down.

Large crowds came and brought many people who were crippled or blind or lame or unable to talk. They placed them, and many others, in front of Jesus, and he healed them all.

Everyone was amazed at what they saw and heard. People who had never spoken could now speak. The lame were healed, the crippled could walk, and the blind were able to see. Everyone was praising the God of Israel.

Do you know with what story this account is placed? It comes just before the feeding of the 4000 (yes, 4000). Crowds had come to Jesus. We can say with some certainty that a crowd of around 4000 people (plus uncountables, such as children) is a large crowd. I don't think they'd come to listen to his preaching. I doubt people were saying "You should hear what Jesus has to say about the Kingdom of Heaven!", or "He's worth listening to!" as much as "He heals people of their sicknesses!" or "He casts out demons!". They'd come to see the Kingdom in action!

We know the story of the feeding of the 5000 – people were with Jesus all day and they were getting hungry, so Jesus feeds them from scant resources. Clearly the feeding of the 4000 was never going to upstage its big brother 5K, so people are less familiar with this story. However, if the story was about the feeding of just 100 people with 5 loaves and 2 fishes would you not still be amazed? But also in this story, and only as Matthew tells it (Mark 8:1 misses it out) it's clear that even more amazing things were happening than the catering miracle.

Please read the passage above carefully and try to place yourself among the crowd. How was it all managed – well organised or friendly chaos? Did Jesus chat with the sick people and get to know them? Did he use words or actions? Did he place his hand on their heads and they fell over? Were all blind people treated in the same way? Did it last for minutes or hours? How noisy was it? What about the disciples – were they assisting Jesus or getting in the way? Think of all those people who were now coming to terms with and rehearsing a working tongue and voice, those who were now learning to balance on the legs and discovering walking, leaping, running; those who could now see being overwhelmed by the beauty of colour and visible form to what they'd only touched before, and things seen that no-one can touch. Were backs straightened, bones re-grown, contagions quelled, infections eliminated? Were there boys, young women, old men in the queue? How close were the onlookers? Did faith rise up in others, too, so that they joined the queue? Did Jesus get tired?

My favourite response to experiencing something miraculous is not "Amen" but "Yes!", with the occasional "Wow!". As James nearly put it, let your "Yes" be "Yes" and your "Wow!" be "Wow!".

And what was it like when Jesus moved into teaching and preaching. Would he have made himself heard over the noise of people praising God?

**What do you make of Jesus' words in Matthew 15:32 in the light of the above?**

**Who got the glory?**

**What physical challenge did the sick people's friends have to overcome in order to come before Jesus?**

**Did anyone get missed out?**

***Father God, it was to you that the people shouted their praises on seeing the work of your Son. I want to see your kingdom at work in my neighbourhood. And I know the person you want to be there***

***demonstrating it, so fill me again with your Holy Spirit and equip me for Kingdom service. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

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## Thursday

### Matthew 9:1-8

Jesus got into a boat and crossed back over to the town where he lived. Some people soon brought to him a crippled man lying on a mat. When Jesus saw how much faith they had, he said to the crippled man, "My friend, don't worry! Your sins are forgiven."

Some teachers of the Law of Moses said to themselves, "Jesus must think he is God!" But Jesus knew what was in their minds, and he said, "Why are you thinking such evil things? Is it easier for me to tell this crippled man that his sins are forgiven or to tell him to get up and walk?"

But I will show you that the Son of Man has the right to forgive sins here on earth." So Jesus said to the man, "Get up! Pick up your mat and go on home." The man got up and went home. When the crowds saw this, they were afraid and praised God for giving such authority to people.

You'll be aware that the Gospel writers each have a style of their own. Matthew, Mark and Luke all appear to share from the same source material, and John is quite different. Each has a slant on the gospel story they want to present, and you'll only get to know this when you sit down and read a whole Gospel at a time. You can pick up information in a book, where you'll hear about Matthew and his slant towards Jewish readers, but nothing beats going to the source and reading it yourself.

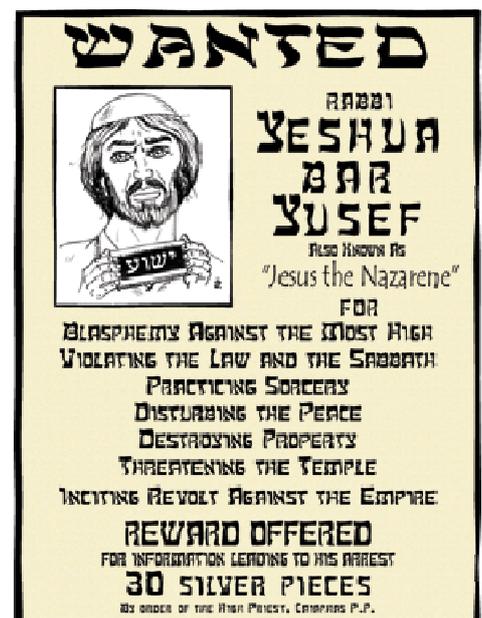
You probably would prefer the story where this man was lowered through the roof (Mark 2:1-12, Luke 5:15-25 – if you heard either of these two and couldn't tell whether it was Mark or Luke then you should read both and note the differences)– much more dramatic, and any Sunday School teacher would go for that in preference to the one above, so that's why we're going for neglected Matthew. If we spend our time wondering what the house owner thought about his house being ransacked and whether it was possible to repair the hole then we'll miss the real story.

Jesus is moved by the faith of the men carrying the mat. To the man lying on it he pronounces forgiveness. At this point we realise that there are people about (of course there are, loads of them), and among them are some teachers of the Law. What they have just witnessed constitutes an act of blasphemy under the Law. Blasphemy has one penalty.

Jesus did not pronounce forgiveness in order to provoke the confrontation. That would detract from the man on the mat. He does it because the man needs it. Goodness knows how many people are bound up in poor health or debilitation through sin in their lives, or perhaps (remind yourself of the second Commandment) through generational sin, the sins of the parents. The Law-breaker Jesus has broken the ties of the Law on us, and we should never, ever, claim that our pig-headedness, laziness, disobedience, bad attitudes and faithlessness comes as a result of our DNA. Like Father, like Son, like us.

Forgiveness effected stage one of the man's healing.

The lawyers may have been genuinely shocked, though over time it may have been more of a rehearsed shock that greeted Jesus as he continued to break the Law. They murmur, and Jesus responds by demonstrating his right to forgive by restoring the man to full health.



There is no way that the lawyers can argue back, as a "sinful" man has been visibly released from the curse of sin and restored to full health. I love the bit where Jesus tells the man to go home and he does.

We should be aware that not all Pharisees, teachers of the law and other officials of the Jewish faith hated Jesus, but enough of them did.

**Do you carry anything (burden, shame, guilt, attitude) from your parents, grandparents or great-grandparents? Have you ever blamed your parents for your own shortcomings?**

**Could sin in your life be affecting your well-being?**

**Are there areas of my life that are still under the Law?**

**How much influence does the faith of others play in my life, and vice versa?**

**Do fear and praise go together?**

***Father God, in Christ Jesus I am free from generational curse, but I am allowed to hang on to generational blessing. I bless you for the positive influence of parents, and if this was lacking in my life, I know that in Jesus I have every blessing in the heavenly realms. Amen.***

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## Friday

### Matthew 15:21-28

Jesus left and went to the territory near the cities of Tyre and Sidon. Suddenly a Canaanite woman from there came out shouting, "Lord and Son of David, have pity on me! My daughter is full of demons."

Jesus did not say a word. But the woman kept following along and shouting, so his disciples came up and asked him to send her away.

Jesus said, "I was sent only to the people of Israel! They are like a flock of lost sheep." The woman came closer. Then she knelt down and begged, "Please help me, Lord!"

Jesus replied, "It isn't right to take food away from children and feed it to dogs." "Lord, that's true," the woman said, "but even dogs get the crumbs that fall from their owner's table."

Jesus answered, "Dear woman, you really do have a lot of faith, and you will be given what you want." At that moment her daughter was healed.

This story is also found in Mark 7:24-30, and it is a much gentler version.

The woman asks for pity, asking Jesus to come beside her in her distress and to recognise what her daughter and she are going through. Imagine what life was like for her, coping with a wayward daughter. Was she behaving in an unseemly manner? Was she self-harming? Was she shaming the family?

And Jesus says nothing.

It is not until the faithful disciples ask Jesus if this woman could be removed that he speaks. She did not qualify for Jesus' attention. As he explains, she does not come from a qualifying region. CA9 9AN fails in the postcode lottery.

She does not take no for an answer. She comes closer to Jesus, having been calling from a respectable distance for a woman and a foreigner, and kneels down before him, begging for help. The shame of it. He explains that it's not right for him to give to her what he should be giving to the Israelites, and he calls her a dog.

So, you're a bitch, you're on the floor. You can't get any lower. What do you do now? You bite.

Without contradicting what Jesus has said she tells him that dogs snap up crumbs that fall from the table. Did the Holy Spirit prompt her with this wonderful reply?

Her persistence of faith in seeking healing for her daughter paid off. It wasn't in God's general plan, yet she snapped at Jesus' ankles and got it. The strict Jew melted and bent the rules for her. Her daughter was freed that moment.

**Are you prepared to grovel like a dog to seek healing for another person?**

**Are you prepared to push for healing?**

**How do we know when to stop?**

***Father God, how much more to me, a child by adoption, are You willing to give me what I require. I seek first your Kingdom in my life and stand on Jesus' promises that you will supply my needs, in life, in health, in well-being. Amen.***

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## Saturday

### Matthew 8:5-10

When Jesus was going into the town of Capernaum, an army officer came up to him and said, "Lord, my servant is at home in such terrible pain that he can't even move." "I will go and heal him," Jesus replied.

But the officer said, "Lord, I'm not good enough for you to come into my house. Just give the order, and my servant will get well. I have officers who give orders to me, and I have soldiers who take orders from me. I can say to one of them, 'Go!' and he goes. I can say to another, 'Come!' and he comes. I can say to my servant, 'Do this!' and he will do it."

When Jesus heard this, he was so surprised that he turned and said to the crowd following him, "I tell you that in all of Israel I've never found anyone with this much faith!

### Luke 7:1-10

After Jesus had finished teaching the people, he went to Capernaum. In that town an army officer's servant was sick and about to die. The officer liked this servant very much. And when he heard about Jesus, he sent some Jewish leaders to ask him to come and heal the servant. The leaders went to Jesus and begged him to do something. They said, "This man deserves your help! He loves our nation and even built us a meeting place." So Jesus went with them.

When Jesus wasn't far from the house, the officer sent some friends to tell him, "Lord, don't go to any trouble for me! I am not good enough for you to come into my house. And I am certainly not worthy to come to you. Just say the word, and my servant will get well. I have officers who give orders to me, and I have soldiers who take orders from me. I can say to one of them, 'Go!' and he goes. I can say to another, 'Come!' and he comes. I can say to my servant, 'Do this!' and he will do it."

When Jesus heard this, he was so surprised that he turned and said to the crowd following him, "In all of Israel I've never found anyone with this much faith!" The officer's friends returned and found the servant well.

See the difference? In Luke's account Jesus does not even meet the officer (in some translations he's a centurion). That makes it more amazing, and this is the one that gets the Sunday School limelight. But Matthew's account is perfectly adequate. Let's pick the meat off Matthew's account first.

Jesus accepts the officer's request – a foreigner, he clearly doesn't have a JE3 1SH postcode either. But the officer tells Jesus that that won't be necessary. This officer knows about rank and status - he is not worthy to have Jesus enter his house. He also knows that an order is an order, whether given or taken, and it is enough to know that an order given will be carried out.

Jesus is so amazed at this soldier's response that he turns to the inevitable crowd around him and tells them that he's never seen faith like that in Israel. You have to guess from Matthew's account that the servant was healed, but if you were wondering then you've missed the story!

Luke adds a level of complexity where the whole process is done by messages and it's started by some synagogue leaders. But Matthew's account is perfectly sufficient and we should start with this and then look at Luke's version.

The dogs can grasp it, and the unwelcome occupying forces can grasp it. Has today's Church today got it?

**Why is praying, believing we have received what we require (Mark 11:24), so difficult?**

**How do I grow my mustard seed of faith, that I might command a mountain to be thrown into the sea?**

***Father God, I'd be happy if my tiny faith could cast a brick into a puddle. Perhaps I need to exercise faith in smaller things before I try landscaping and earthworks. Provide me with opportunities for exercising faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

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## Sunday

### John 5:1-18

Jesus went to Jerusalem for another Jewish festival. In the city near the sheep gate was a pool with five porches, and its name in Hebrew was Bethzatha. Many sick, blind, lame, and crippled people were lying close to the pool.

Beside the pool was a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw the man and realized that he had been crippled for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to be healed?" The man answered, "Lord, I don't have anyone to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up. I try to get in, but someone else always gets there first."

Jesus told him, "Pick up your mat and walk!" Right then the man was healed. He picked up his mat and started walking around.

The day on which this happened was a Sabbath. When the Jewish leaders saw the man carrying his mat, they said to him, "This is the Sabbath! No one is allowed to carry a mat on the Sabbath." But he replied, "The man who healed me told me to pick up my mat and walk." They asked him, "Who is this man that told you to pick up your mat and walk?" But he did not know who Jesus was, and Jesus had left because of the crowd.

Later, Jesus met the man in the temple and told him, "You are now well. But don't sin anymore or something worse might happen to you." The man left and told the leaders that Jesus was the one who had healed him.

They started making a lot of trouble for Jesus because he did things like this on the Sabbath. But Jesus said, "My Father has never stopped working, and that is why I keep on working." Now the leaders wanted to kill Jesus for two reasons. First, he had broken the law of the Sabbath. But even worse, he had said that God was his Father, which made him equal with God.

It was believed that an angel came from time to time to stir the water. First one in got healed. The man had been waiting there 38 years already. Jesus knew it was the Sabbath day. Surely he could have waited a day? But why should he? Here's a man who wants to be healed.

The water would not have healed him even if an angel had touched it. He needed healing from the one who also forgives.

"Do you want to be healed?" It's an odd question to ask. "Well, I've been here 38 years – what do you think?!" Jesus knew that. He was actually saying "I can heal you now. Do you want me to heal you?" The man's reply reveals that he is still looking at his own weakness and failure and has not picked up on what Jesus is saying, but Jesus does not let that get in the way.

Jesus does not touch him or help him up. He simply tells him to get up. The man responded and did the impossible – he got up by himself. This was a simple act of faith in a man he had never met before.

He'd sat quietly in the same place for many years and had possibly not even heard about Jesus. He didn't recognise Jesus when he came to him. Imagine responding to a complete stranger's call to get up.

John's account has the man just walking off. How rude! But John is not interested in polite behaviour, and neither should we lest it gets in the way of the healing. The Jewish leaders spot the man walking with his mat on the Sabbath. For them Jesus had now broken two commandments.

Let's get a bit of context into our world. We meet people in many conditions – people who are ill, or suffering from progressive diseases, people with disabilities or missing a limb; people with congenital conditions. All sorts. We wonder if we can see healings like those that happened in Jesus' time. Is this possible? Has modern science, medicine, surgery put an end to this work?

Where are the churches where this work of healing is going on? Why are there so few healers (if indeed healers they be) and where are the crowds?

That mountain-casting tiny grain of faith (Jesus meant this to be an encouragement but it seems more like a condemnation) seems to be elusive. Perhaps we should start where we are, and not get hung up over comparisons between ourselves and Jesus. Perhaps we should ask God to find us someone who is just mildly unwell so that we may pray with that person. Perhaps we should ask God to find some more people, and so build us up in faith as we witness to His power at work through us.

**Am I prepared to step out to offer to pray with someone who is mildly unwell, or do I let nature take its course?**

**Do I prefer to look at my incapability rather than the capability of Jesus?**

**Is my spiritual life crippled by doubt, and will I still be looking at my failure 38 years from now?**

**What will cause the crowds to come to our church in Witnesham, Tuddenham, Westerfield, Ipswich?**

***Father God, allow me to witness your power at work in healing and encourage me by your Holy Spirit to step out like Jesus and say his words to someone who needs to be healed. Place your hand on mine as I turn the crank of my engine of faith. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

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## Monday

### Matthew 12:9-28

Jesus left and went into one of the Jewish meeting places, where there was a man whose hand was crippled. Some Pharisees wanted to accuse Jesus of doing something wrong, and they asked him, "Is it right to heal someone on the Sabbath?"

Jesus answered, "If you had a sheep that fell into a ditch on the Sabbath, wouldn't you lift it out? People are worth much more than sheep, and so it is right to do good on the Sabbath." Then Jesus told the man, "Hold out your hand." The man did, and it became as healthy as the other one.

The Pharisees left and started making plans to kill Jesus. When Jesus found out what was happening, he left there and large crowds followed him. He healed all of their sick, but warned them not to tell anyone about him.

...

Some people brought to Jesus a man who was blind and could not talk because he had a demon in him. Jesus healed the man, and then he was able to talk and see. The crowds were so amazed that they asked, "Could Jesus be the Son of David?"

When the Pharisees heard this, they said, "He forces out demons by the power of Beelzebul, the ruler of the demons!" Jesus knew what they were thinking, and he said to them: Any kingdom where people fight each other will end up ruined. And a town or family that fights will soon destroy itself. So if Satan fights against himself, how can his kingdom last?

Two stories of healing from Matthew, both with trouble looming. Did you notice what happened between those two stories? Jesus healed large numbers of sick people. Matthew mentions it in passing. Did those words just fly past your eyes? One verse - he healed all of their sick, all of them. Everyone. No wonder he was being followed by large crowds.

The Pharisees are out to catch Jesus out. It's a good question they ask, if only they were asking for the right reason, but Jesus' reply is better, and the outcome is better still – a man's hand is restored (at the invitation of the Pharisees!).

Do you believe that a man's hand can be restored in an instant, that withered flesh and dead veins can be revived? That twisted or clawed fingers can spring into their intended position just like that? If you're not sure, then ask if in an instant, in the twinkling of an eye, we, too shall be changed (1 Co 15:47-53)? For we do expect to be clothed afresh in an eternal body when we meet Jesus, don't we?

We might feel that this sort of thing is not going to happen in our time, and where we live, but Jesus didn't reserve it for himself alone. Remember that he sent his disciples out to do the same. There is an amazing verse in John 14 that brings it home, to here, and now, to you and me. You might like to find it – just Google "the works I do".

The blind man has a demon that has silenced his tongue. Jesus deals with both issues and people are amazed. They ask the right question about him. The Pharisees don't like it because Jesus is undermining their authority. They make the wrong suggestion that Jesus is linked with Satan, that he uses Satan to cast out demons. Nonsense, of course.

Jesus has authority to heal. After all, The Son, the Word is the agent of our creation. Did he ever make an imperfect creation? Has he not the right to put right what for whatever reason (another discussion, another time) has gone wrong? I don't have that right because I am not the Word through whom all things were

created. But Jesus has delegated authority and power in his name to us, not so that we can sit on it, but so that we can exercise it.

**Can Jesus perform his acts of healing mercy through me? If so, how do I make this happen?**

**Have you ever rejected something of God because it came through someone you don't like (or perhaps are envious of) or because it might interfere with your Church tradition?**

**What is your response to the everyday acceptance in Jesus' day of powers of evil (demons) taking over people? Could these people be mentally unbalanced, and Jesus healed that, or was Jesus casting real evil out of people?**

**Are you certain that Jesus healed people? What would it mean for the gospel if Jesus hadn't performed healings and cleansings?**

***Father God, Jesus lived in different days, but is spiritual life the same now as then?. Help me come to understand the scope of the victorious Christian life lived in the power and the authority of Christ Jesus.. Amen.***

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## Tuesday

### Mark 8:22-30

As Jesus and his disciples were going into Bethsaida, some people brought a blind man to him and begged him to touch the man. Jesus took him by the hand and led him out of the village, where he spat into the man's eyes. He placed his hands on the blind man and asked him if he could see anything. The man looked up and said, "I see people, but they look like trees walking around."

Once again Jesus placed his hands on the man's eyes, and this time the man stared. His eyes were healed, and he saw everything clearly. Jesus said to him, "You may return home now, but don't go into the village."

Jesus and his disciples went to the villages near the town of Caesarea Philippi. As they were walking along, he asked them, "What do people say about me?" The disciples answered, "Some say you are John the Baptist or maybe Elijah. Others say you are one of the prophets."

Then Jesus asked them, "But who do you say I am?" "You are the Messiah!" Peter replied. Jesus warned the disciples not to tell anyone about him.

Jesus takes the man away from the village he was entering. It doesn't seem very hygienic a method to use, but Jesus spat all the same. The man didn't see that one coming.

It's a two stage healing. Possibly the matching up of what he now sees with what he once only touched and heard - the opening out into three dimensions of what was once the closeness of everything for a blind person, the heightened awareness of space and movement once only garnered from hearing around and overhead, the new association of heat with light, the *invisibility* of the wind that blew on your face - all needed time to adjust to the explosion of image in restored sight.

Jesus tells the man to go straight home. Did the man find his way home easily?! From time to time we read of Jesus instructing people (though not all follow that instruction) not to tell others of what has happened. I wonder whether it's simply because he doesn't at this moment need the crowds who'd come seeking him.

There were so many people who crowded around Jesus. O Sabbath rest by Galilee may have been a rare thing for Jesus during his ministry. Would he have become tired after healing so many people? Why not – he's ~~only~~ human after all?

When Jesus asks his disciples "Who do people say I am?", they can base their answers on the responses of hundreds (thousands?) of lives changed through healing and cleansing, but it takes the Holy Spirit's prompting of Peter (see Mark's account) to bring out the amazing truth that Jesus is Messiah. Wow!



**Am I prepared to accept a Jesus who uses mouthwash to heal?**

**Am I prepared to bring myself to Jesus for healing (see picture)?**

**Who do you say he/He is?**

***Father God, I want to know Jesus as Lord over all aspects of my life. Reveal the dark side of my heart to his light, so that there is no place where the vermin of sin can take hold. Help me to understand why so much of Jesus' time on earth was spent in healing, cleansing and restoring and teach me how I can be more like him. In his name. Amen.***

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## Wednesday

### Matthew 9:20-22

A woman who had been bleeding for twelve years came up behind Jesus and barely touched his clothes. She had said to herself, "If I can just touch his clothes, I will get well." Jesus turned. He saw the woman and said, "Don't worry! You are now well because of your faith." At that moment she was healed.

It's not such a great version as the one we'd normally hear from Mark's or Luke's account (Mk 5:25 - Who touched my clothes? Luke 8:43 - Who touched me?). All we have is the inference that Jesus had either felt the touch on his garment (unlikely) or that he had sensed a change in his own state.

He turns, sees the woman and understands.

The woman's long back story of failure with doctors and treatments for her condition, her financial losses and her deteriorating health are not included in Matthew's account - he gives us the bare bones again. Sunday School usually goes for the other two accounts. But isn't there a danger that we want to go for the more embroidered stories because of the "human" element in them?

Does it matter that the woman had lost all her money, was even worse than when she started seeing doctors? Does it matter that she pushed her way through the crowd? Does it matter that she touched the very base of his garment? Does it matter whether Jesus senses his power going out of him or not? Is not the healing that Jesus releases the heart of this story? If in this case Jesus didn't know about it until it had happened, does that matter, or are we looking for unusual angles?

Healing needs faith. That faith is usually two-sided, with Jesus playing the major role. Dead people have very little faith in their resuscitation, and people who are unable to get to Jesus also depend on the faith of those who get them before him. What the Bible calls demons have a remarkable level of faith – they know who Jesus really is, and in his presence they are fearful and obedient to his will.

This woman had faith. So did Father God, who allowed the healing to take place without Jesus' knowledge. How brave was she in her unclean state to come modestly to the hem of Jesus' garment, for she would not have been able to talk to him or touch him, or him her? She formulated and grabbed a tiny frame of opportunity to exercise her faith in such a way that would preserve her decency (she was unclean) and Jesus' dignity, and she went for it – she touched his clothing with just one fingertip. There's no magic in clothing or in the method she chose, though she could do little else. Healing comes through faith coupled with your creator's desire to see you as you were planned. God honoured her action.

**Do you come to Jesus after all else fails?**

**How much faith do you have in your little finger tip?**

**I suffer from ..... (fill in this space, listing in order of simplest to most complex- use an extra sheet if you need one). Does God want me to suffer from these?**

***Father God, you know the state I'm in. You don't need to read my list. I want to believe that sickness and disease are not from you. Give me the faith and boldness to come to Christ Jesus or seek through a brother or sister in Christ the cure of the simplest one on my list. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.***

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## Thursday

### Luke 17:11-19

On his way to Jerusalem, Jesus went along the border between Samaria and Galilee. As he was going into a village, ten men with leprosy came toward him. They stood at a distance and shouted, "Jesus, Master, have pity on us!"

Jesus looked at them and said, "Go show yourselves to the priests." On their way they were healed.

When one of them discovered that he was healed, he came back, shouting praises to God. He bowed down at the feet of Jesus and thanked him. The man was from the country of Samaria.

Jesus asked, "Weren't ten men healed? Where are the other nine? Why was this foreigner the only one who came back to thank God?" Then Jesus told the man, "You may get up and go. Your faith has made you well."

Only Luke tells this story. Sunday School versions like to emphasise the one leper who said thank you to Jesus. Sermons4Kids website (it came up on Google) has "[The Thankful Leper](#)" as a sermon outline, with the tag line "Don't forget to say thank you". Once again we miss the real point, which was that those ten lepers literally obeyed Jesus' command to go and show themselves to the priests and were healed as they went. One of them did dare to turn back and say thank you. Anyway, wouldn't you do what you were told when Jesus tells you (Luke 9:62, Genesis 19:26, John 6:66)?

Yes, the one who came back may have had more reason to return. He was from the other side of the border, a Samaritan, and he'd have known Jesus was a Jew. He might have expected him to heal only the other nine (assuming they were all Jews) and not him. Sunday School does not look at the amazing gift Jesus gave to this one man. It highlights good manners instead! I'm not knocking Sunday School – It's that I'm writing for those who are no longer harking back for spiritual milk.

When is a person healed? Is it when Jesus speaks the words? In this instance Jesus only tells the men to present themselves to the priests. He does not pronounce healing, or touch them or even ask if they have faith to be healed. He has pity on them, and that pity is expressed in his command. The transformation to health did not happen until they were on their way. What if they had replied: Show ourselves to the priests in our state? What's the point – just look at us! But they'd already started the process by calling out to Jesus from a respectable distance.

The ten did not look at their present condition or appearance. They obeyed Jesus and went. Some of these people could have been in an advanced stage of the disease, with stumps for feet and lumps for hands. Did that stop them? Their faith had made them well, but Jesus did it.

**Do the frequent references to the superior faith of foreigners or outsiders reflect in any way on the Church today?**

**Can Jesus heal today?**

**How does Jesus heal today?**

***Father God, the ten lepers called out to Jesus for pity, and Jesus' compassion was roused. Shake my heart, Lord, to the plight of those who suffer, and use me in some way to embark with them on a journey towards healing. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

## Friday

### John 9:1-41

As Jesus walked along, he saw a man who had been blind since birth. Jesus' disciples asked, "Teacher, why was this man born blind? Was it because he or his parents sinned?" "No, it wasn't!" Jesus answered. "But because of his blindness, you will see God work a miracle for him.

..

After Jesus said this, he spit on the ground. He made some mud and smeared it on the man's eyes. Then he said, "Go and wash off the mud in Siloam Pool." The man went and washed in Siloam, which means "One Who Is Sent." When he had washed off the mud, he could see.

The man's neighbours and the people who had seen him begging wondered if he really could be the same man. Some of them said he was the same beggar, while others said he only looked like him. But he told them, "I am that man." "Then how can you see?" they asked. He answered, "Someone named Jesus made some mud and smeared it on my eyes. He told me to go and wash it off in Siloam Pool. When I did, I could see."

"Where is he now?" they asked. "I don't know," he answered. The day when Jesus made the mud and healed the man was a Sabbath. So the people took the man to the Pharisees. They asked him how he was able to see, and he answered, "Jesus made some mud and smeared it on my eyes. Then after I washed it off, I could see."

Some of the Pharisees said, "This man Jesus doesn't come from God. If he did, he would not break the law of the Sabbath." Others asked, "How could someone who is a sinner work such a miracle?" Since the Pharisees could not agree among themselves, they asked the man, "What do you say about this one who healed your eyes?"

"He is a prophet!" the man told them. But the Jewish leaders would not believe that the man had once been blind. They sent for his parents and asked them, "Is this the son that you said was born blind? How can he now see?"

The man's parents answered, "We are certain that he is our son, and we know that he was born blind. But we don't know how he got his sight or who gave it to him. Ask him! He is old enough to speak for himself." The man's parents said this because they were afraid of the Jewish leaders. The leaders had already agreed that no one was to have anything to do with anyone who said Jesus was the Messiah.

The leaders called the man back and said, "Swear by God to tell the truth! We know that Jesus is a sinner." The man replied, "I don't know if he is a sinner or not. All I know is that I used to be blind, but now I can see!"

"What did he do to you?" the Jewish leaders asked. "How did he heal your eyes?" The man answered, "I have already told you once, and you refused to listen. Why do you want me to tell you again? Do you also want to become his disciples?"

The leaders insulted the man and said, "You are his follower! We are followers of Moses. We are sure that God spoke to Moses, but we don't even know where Jesus comes from." "How strange!" the man replied. "He healed my eyes, and yet you don't know where he comes from. We know that God listens only to people who love and obey him. God doesn't listen to sinners. And this is the first time in history that anyone has ever given sight to someone born blind. Jesus could not do anything unless he came from God."

The leaders told the man, "You have been a sinner since the day you were born! Do you think you can teach us anything?" Then they said, "You can never come back into any of our meeting places!"

When Jesus heard what had happened, he went and found the man. Then Jesus asked, "Do you have faith in the Son of Man?" He replied, "Sir, if you will tell me who he is, I will put my faith in him." "You have already seen him," Jesus answered, "and right now he is talking with you."

The man said, "Lord, I put my faith in you!" Then he worshiped Jesus. Jesus told him, "I came to judge the people of this world. I am here to give sight to the blind and to make blind everyone who can see."

When the Pharisees heard Jesus say this, they asked, "Are we blind?" Jesus answered, "If you were blind, you would not be guilty. But now that you claim to see, you will keep on being guilty."

This is such an amazing narrative, and it is told only by John. Read it fully and carefully. John retells only a few healing stories, and he picks them with great care as he paints the big picture of the Jesus that he wants to tell us about. The (long) story unfolds from a healing into a deep discussion of who Jesus is, followed by another meeting with Jesus. The story of one man's sight is balanced by that of others' spiritual blindness.

I can seldom remember whether Jesus spits in the person's face or puts his fingers in ears or slaps mud. While these actions are unusual, to me they are cake-icing – give me the filling, please. It was not the mud that healed the man. It was Jesus.

The man never saw Jesus until later. Jesus had sent him off with mud in his eye to wash somewhere. He obeyed. His sight was restored.

I love the interrogation scene with the Pharisees. The man stands on the truth of what has happened. He is brave enough to tell it as it is to the officials, and though he may never have had to face them in the past, and had never witnessed their frequently frowning faces before today, he is not frightened. The evidence is there for him and them to see. He has no fear, though his parents cluck away like chickens.

He is banned from all religious meeting places. Once again Jesus establishes that he is Lord of the Sabbath and he is healing sinners (thereby also forgiving them for the sins of the parents). The Pharisees are attempting to fit the truth to their traditions. They are blind to the reality that Jesus, the fulfilment of The Law, is greater than Moses. Little do they know that their desire to kill Jesus would ultimately result in the sweeping away of all their authority.

Jesus has compassion for the man who spoke the truth. He finds him (he would). John's narrative slips into the poetic and mystical at times, but in that passage Jesus echoes his manifesto – "sight to the blind"

**Would God pass on blindness to a son whose parents had sinned?**

**Are there traditions you hold on to in order to mask the truth?**

**Are there truths about you you'd prefer to be blind to?**

**Do your friends know about "someone named Jesus"?**

***Father God, your amazing grace that overflows in Jesus has made me, once-lost found, and once-blind, seeing. Give me the courage to speak the truth to all, whatever the consequences. Amen.***

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## Saturday

### John 11:1-47

A man by the name of Lazarus was sick in the village of Bethany. He had two sisters, Mary and Martha. This was the same Mary who later poured perfume on the Lord's head and wiped his feet with her hair. The sisters sent a message to the Lord and told him that his good friend Lazarus was sick.

When Jesus heard this, he said, "His sickness won't end in death. It will bring glory to God and his Son." Jesus loved Martha and her sister and brother. But he stayed where he was for two more days.

Then he said to his disciples, "Now we will go back to Judea."

...

Then he told them, "Our friend Lazarus is asleep, and I am going there to wake him up." They replied, "Lord, if he is asleep, he will get better." Jesus really meant that Lazarus was dead, but they thought he was talking only about sleep. Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus is dead! I am glad that I wasn't there, because now you will have a chance to put your faith in me. Let's go to him."

...

When Jesus got to Bethany, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. Bethany was only about two miles from Jerusalem, and many people had come from the city to comfort Martha and Mary because their brother had died.

When Martha heard that Jesus had arrived, she went out to meet him, but Mary stayed in the house. Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. Yet even now I know that God will do anything you ask." Jesus told her, "Your brother will live again!" Martha answered, "I know that he will be raised to life on the last day, when all the dead are raised."

Jesus then said, "I am the one who raises the dead to life! Everyone who has faith in me will live, even if they die. And everyone who lives because of faith in me will never really die. Do you believe this?" "Yes, Lord!" she replied. "I believe that you are Christ, the Son of God. You are the one we hoped would come into the world." After Martha said this, she went and privately said to her sister Mary, "The Teacher is here, and he wants to see you."

As soon as Mary heard this, she got up and went out to Jesus. He was still outside the village where Martha had gone to meet him. Many people had come to comfort Mary, and when they saw her quickly leave the house, they thought she was going out to the tomb to cry. So they followed her.

Mary went to where Jesus was. Then as soon as she saw him, she knelt at his feet and said, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." When Jesus saw that Mary and the people with her were crying, he was terribly upset and asked, "Where have you put his body?" They replied, "Lord, come and you will see." Jesus started crying, and the people said, "See how much he loved Lazarus." Some of them said, "He gives sight to the blind. Why couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?"

Jesus was still terribly upset. So he went to the tomb, which was a cave with a stone rolled against the entrance. Then he told the people to roll the stone away. But Martha said, "Lord,

you know that Lazarus has been dead four days, and there will be a bad smell." Jesus replied, "Didn't I tell you that if you had faith, you would see the glory of God?"

After the stone had been rolled aside, Jesus looked up toward heaven and prayed, "Father, I thank you for answering my prayer. I know that you always answer my prayers. But I said this, so that the people here would believe that you sent me."

When Jesus had finished praying, he shouted, "Lazarus, come out!" The man who had been dead came out. His hands and feet were wrapped with strips of burial cloth, and a cloth covered his face. Jesus then told the people, "Untie him and let him go."

Many of the people who had come to visit Mary saw the things that Jesus did, and they put their faith in him. Others went to the Pharisees and told what Jesus had done. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees called the council together and said, "What should we do? This man is working a lot of miracles.

As I re-read the story I discovered that my mouth had stuck open. John selects his stories carefully – he majors on dialogue and relationship. There is wonderful dialogue between Jesus and his disciples, and between him and Martha and Mary there is the sense of a deepening relationship.

Jesus was not boasting when he said that Lazarus will live. He was telling the truth. He knew with certainty at that moment that Lazarus would not stay dead. Jesus still has to believe this with all his heart. The thought of his good friends nursing their sick brother and the grief in that household as they now prepare his dead body for entombment, must have weighed heavily on Jesus. But, to put it bluntly, you cannot raise live people.

Jesus arrives. Martha shows herself to be a far deeper person than the petty worrier we read about in another story. Did she actually have faith to believe that Jesus could even now save the day?

The people in the village all believed that Jesus could have cured Lazarus of his illness had he been there earlier. But now Jesus is demanding a higher level of faith from them, and for many this would be too much. "If only he'd been there earlier", "Why couldn't he have kept Lazarus from dying?". Martha gets practical again, and is concerned that the body would have started decomposing by now. She is right, of course, but Jesus overrules natural law.

Before he summons the soul of Lazarus from the shades of Sheol and back to the earthly body he prays. This is a big task, and Jesus knows he has the authority to do this. After all, 'dem bones will rise and reform on the Day of Resurrection. What Jesus prays is not necessarily words. In God's presence is fullness of joy (Ps 16:11).

John has laid out conversations that show the levels of faith that Mary and Martha both needed, and neither of them came quite up to the mark. But Jesus covers the gap with them, as he does with us, if only we allow him.

A voice thunders through the dark halls of Sheol. A soul responds to the command. Lazarus comes out the tomb, covered in grave clothes, but clean and revived. This was no zombie B movie. The Glory of God was revealed that day. Even the Pharisees had to admit it.

**Could we hope to see in our place in our time what happened in Bethany then?**

**Does this story make you tremble?**

**Where does your faith refuse to go?**

***Father, I want the faith that stays with the project to its conclusion, and I want to see your glory revealed through it. Encourage me when I hit a wall of unbelief, or when I see a mountain before me that I don't think I have strength to climb. Remind me of your promise that you will not desert me on the course you have set me. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

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## Sunday

### Mark 13:22-23

False messiahs and false prophets will come and work miracles and signs. They will even try to fool God's chosen ones. But be on your guard! That's why I am telling you these things now.

Jesus was talking about how the cosmos would end. These words may be hard to take in if we've never really understood just who Jesus was, and how his return to earth may be preceded by spiritual fakes. But we say in our Apostles' Creed that he will come again.

There have been false Messiahs and prophets for years. What Jesus is talking about is some person or persons who will appear to be godly and will be able to work miracles (and, I presume, healings) – it will take a brave person to confront them.

Well, there are some strange and quite ungodly things going on right now, and they are gaining in stature and influence. While some philosophies and practices are clearly barmy there are other sorts of therapies that to my mind are dangerous. Those that link to entities for channelling of power are among them, and there are quite a few to choose from in Suffolk.

There's Spiritual Healing, for instance The Erasmus [not the famous Erasmus] Foundation Healing Clinic in Laxfield, opened last year by Dr. Dan Poulter MP, promotes Spritual Healing. "In The Erasmus Foundation we believe that spiritual healing is a gift given by the Great Mind to be treasured and used to help people and animals that are suffering, mentally or physically."

R. B. bills himself as a "World Renowned Spiritual Healer & Surgeon". This "trance medium" claims that he has for the past forty eight years worked with Spiritual Surgeon Paul of Tarsus who lived on the earth plane over two thousand years ago. R. works in a deep state of trance in a very natural way with Paul to provide a form of spiritual healing. You can catch them both in Bury St Edmunds for an appointment fee of £35.

I have discovered on the internet nine so-called Spiritual Healers listed within a few miles of my home.

Enough of this. Our Brother Paul of Tarsus is not going to be sitting in heaven passing tit-bits down to some trance medium. What he wrote in the Bible is open for all of us to read and act upon.

We have to be careful, even within our churches, too, just in case someone is riding high on a false spiritual wave. We must be directed to Jesus Christ the true healer and him alone. Some of our churches integrate healing into services of worship (often in a sacramental context), and some offer services which are all about healing. The Church of England (I expect other denominations, too) also recognises that there is a need for what they call deliverance ministries, and this is highly regulated in order to protect all parties involved.

Are we ready to acknowledge that our Christian life is founded on Jesus Christ, who came to this earth in order to save the people from sin and its consequences and to usher in the Kingdom of God? Our redeemed life on earth is the start of our inheritance in heaven. Can we not expect to see Jesus' healing power revealed as we proclaim the Kingdom?

So, will we let the fakes, the liars and charlatans fill the gap where the Church has failed to act, and will we take the fullness of God to this world, or are we just sitting around in heaven's waiting room waiting for the glory train to come?

**How do we intervene to stop fake spiritual practices in our neighbourhood?**

**What marks true Christian healing?**

**Is this ministry restricted to ordained people?**



Do I want to be in the

or the



***Father God, you have appointed a place and a role for me in my local church. You may have been waiting for some time for me to take up that role. I can no longer sit in the building and expect only to be served. Build me up as Jesus built his disciples up, through learning and experience. In his name. Amen.***

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## Monday

### 1 Corinthians 12:4-12

There are different kinds of spiritual gifts, but they all come from the same Spirit. There are different ways to serve the same Lord, and we can each do different things. Yet the same God works in all of us and helps us in everything we do.

The Spirit has given each of us a special way of serving others. Some of us can speak with wisdom, while others can speak with knowledge, but these gifts come from the same Spirit. To others the Spirit has given great faith or the power to heal the sick or the power to work mighty miracles.

Some of us are prophets, and some of us recognize when God's Spirit is present. Others can speak different kinds of languages, and still others can tell what these languages mean. But it is the Spirit who does all this and decides which gifts to give to each of us. The body of Christ has many different parts, just as any other body does.

Paul is filling in detail about what a church should be. He's talking about the Church and also about each individual fellowship of believers in their churches that together form the Church of Christ.

Paul explains that these ministries are essential to the functioning and growing of churches – without any one of them we are incomplete. Paul says that not everyone is given every gift. If I concentrate on healing (or in fact any particular gift) there is a danger that because I do not see it working in or through me then I do not have the gift. The retort I have to give myself then is to ask which one has been given to me? But how do I know if I have a gift if I do not test it out? I do not think we are necessarily given one gift, either. We need people of Godly wisdom, men and women of towering faith, people who speak prophetic words from God and holy polyglots, too, in our churches – has God gifted you as one of those?

### 1 Corinthians 12:27-30

Together you are the body of Christ. Each one of you is part of his body. First, God chose some people to be apostles and prophets and teachers for the church. But he also chose some to work miracles or heal the sick or help others or be leaders or speak different kinds of languages. Not everyone is an apostle. Not everyone is a prophet. Not everyone is a teacher. Not everyone can work miracles. Not everyone can heal the sick. Not everyone can speak different kinds of languages. Not everyone can tell what these languages mean.

This translation misses out the enumeration of these ministries – in the Greek it's *firstly* prophets, *secondly* apostles, *thirdly* teachers. I wonder who the podium-position holders are in our church! Then it's miracles, and then healings, so healing is not a top-ranking ministry. In a church of, say, 30 people how many of us should be gifted with a healing ministry? And how many of the disciples did Jesus authorise to heal when he sent them out? And when the healers are away who then takes up the role at home?

Is the parish priest all of the above? Certainly not. If either of our ordained ministers were allowed to take up all the reins they would stumble and we would be at fault for letting them and deeply in sin if we expected them to do it all. Is the benefice ministry team the group that does all this stuff? No.

**Could I have a ministry in the body of Christ that is not listed above?**

**Do the ministries above constitute a complete set for Christ's Church today?**

**Could flower-arranging, or playing the organ (other roles could be mentioned) be a ministry in the Body of Christ? How?**

**Is there something to which I am being called but am reluctant to step forward for?**

**Is there someone I am not praying for?**

**Is there someone I am not ministering to?**

***Father God, it's a tough list, but I would prefer to know what I ought to be doing rather than think that what I am doing is right. Reveal my place in the Body of Christ, a hole that only this jigsaw piece you created will fit. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

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## Tuesday

### Luke 10:1-24

Later the Lord chose seventy-two other followers and sent them out two by two to every town and village where he was about to go. He said to them: A large crop is in the fields, but there are only a few workers. Ask the Lord in charge of the harvest to send out workers to bring it in.

Now go, but remember, I am sending you like lambs into a pack of wolves. Don't take along a moneybag or a travelling bag or sandals. And don't waste time greeting people on the road. As soon as you enter a home, say, "God bless this home with peace." If the people living there are peace-loving, your prayer for peace will bless them. But if they are not peace-loving, your prayer will return to you. Stay with the same family, eating and drinking whatever they give you, because workers are worth what they earn. Don't move around from house to house.

If the people of a town welcome you, eat whatever they offer. Heal their sick and say, "God's kingdom will soon be here!"

But if the people of a town refuse to welcome you, go out into the street and say, "We are shaking the dust from our feet as a warning to you. And you can be sure that God's kingdom will soon be here!" I tell you that on the day of judgment the people of Sodom will get off easier than the people of that town!

...

When the seventy-two followers returned, they were excited and said, "Lord, even the demons obeyed when we spoke in your name!" Jesus told them: I saw Satan fall from heaven like a flash of lightning.

I have given you the power to trample on snakes and scorpions and to defeat the power of your enemy Satan. Nothing can harm you. But don't be happy because evil spirits obey you. Be happy that your names are written in heaven!

At that same time, Jesus felt the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit, and he said: My Father, Lord of heaven and earth, I am grateful that you hid all this from wise and educated people and showed it to ordinary people. Yes, Father, that is what pleased you. My Father has given me everything, and he is the only one who knows the Son. The only one who really knows the Father is the Son. But the Son wants to tell others about the Father, so that they can know him too.

Jesus then turned to his disciples and said to them in private, "You are really blessed to see what you see! Many prophets and kings were eager to see what you see and to hear what you hear. But I tell you that they did not see or hear."

Jesus sends a large group out in twos to do what he's been doing. The orders are quite straightforward – more or less as they were in Luke 9:1. Jesus tells them to heal the sick, and to get on with it, but they do much more. When they return, there is excitement. Notice that all they can talk about is that demons submitted to them. Compare that with Luke 9:37, just a little earlier in Luke's narrative - you bet they were excited!

Jesus says he saw the effects of the disciples' work – Satan falls from heaven (from a spiritual realm?). Or could it be that the Word, the Son of God did see the first fall of Satan shortly after creation, or perhaps is looking ahead prophetically to the final defeat of Satan?

Jesus reminds the disciples that he had given them the authority to do what they did, and also to remember that all of that is still less important than having our names written in the Book of Life. Spiritual commando work counts for nothing if we do not know that we are saved and protected by the blood of Christ.

The verses that follow look as if Luke went outside for a cup of tea and John popped in and penned a couple of verses. It's called the Johannine Thunderbolt. Better to enjoy it than try to remember the fancy name. It's a wonderful, intimate passage that bears re-reading.

**Did Jesus ever send us out to do small talk?**

**How often do you return home excited from the Lord's work?**

**Are we called to be part of Jesus' healing ministry?**

**What authority do I have?**

***Father God, I want to know that what I do in Jesus' name and on his authority has an effect both here and in the spiritual realms. Tune my spirit to your Holy Spirit, that I might look beyond the horizons of the earthbound and into eternity. In Jesus' name. Amen.***

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## Wednesday

### John 21:25

Jesus did many other things. If they were all written in books, I don't suppose there would be room enough in the whole world for all the books.

I hope you've picked up from this series that Jesus was a very busy man. The Gospels picked some healings and cleansings from what was a very large list indeed. For their purposes the gospel-writers did not attempt to produce a catalogue but a representative sample. Jesus may have healed other people in a similar way; he may have preached the same message in another place; he may have fed other crowds. Crowds followed Jesus everywhere because they were witnessing first hand what Jesus was able to do. It was not just that that excited them. Jesus healed people because he had compassion for their conditions, for the helplessness that afflicted the sick, the disabled (a modern term that perhaps lacks hope) and the possessed.

There are stories of children, young people and older people being healed, men and women, Israelites and Gentiles. There are individual and group healings. Evil spirits come flying out of those who are possessed. Missing parts are restored. Conditions and long-term disabilities (there's that word again) are put right in an instant.

Imagine the different sorts of people that would be following Jesus - those eager to see miracles and healings; those who would bring themselves before him; those who were brought in by others; the desperate (but not quite), the unclean, the troubled, the suffering, the imperfect and blighted. There would be no point in telling the same daily story of crowds following Jesus. We should not forget that Jesus was a very public figure. But Jesus did not make a show of what he did. He was cautious at times, probably for the good of the one being healed (but also at times for a little peace and quiet for himself?), to warn people not to blurt about it. He would never have whipped up the crowds, but I expect that there was high praise to Father God for the wonders that this man performed. The healings and miracles that took place around Jesus were more powerful a revelation of God's kingdom than any long sermon or teaching (this one included).

Jesus was not a teacher or preacher. He was not a good man who taught us about honest living. What the Gospels all tell us is that he is the Son of God came to earth in human form. He came not to look cute in a manger with shepherds but to live a human life like ours and to demonstrate in obedience to Father God the greatest love we could ever know. That love was revealed in restoring health and well-being to people and in the sacrifice of his perfect life to save us and the whole world from the eternal punishment of sin and to bring us into the kingdom of God.

No apologies for bad pronunciation: <https://vimeo.com/humblebeast/incarnation>

**How many people might Jesus have healed or cleansed in his life on earth?**

**Is there a place for the "We're gonna see a miracle tonight" evangelist?**

**Who is God expecting to continue this work of the Kingdom?**

***Father God, help me understand why you came in Jesus. Amen.***

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## Thursday

### John 14:1-12

Jesus said to his disciples, "Don't be worried! Have faith in God and have faith in me. There are many rooms in my Father's house. I wouldn't tell you this, unless it was true. I am going there to prepare a place for each of you.

After I have done this, I will come back and take you with me. Then we will be together. You know the way to where I am going." Thomas said, "Lord, we don't even know where you are going! How can we know the way?"

"I am the way, the truth, and the life!" Jesus answered. "Without me, no one can go to the Father. If you had known me, you would have known the Father. But from now on, you do know him, and you have seen him."

Philip said, "Lord, show us the Father. That is all we need." Jesus replied: Philip, I have been with you for a long time. Don't you know who I am? If you have seen me, you have seen the Father. How can you ask me to show you the Father? Don't you believe that I am one with the Father and that the Father is one with me? What I say isn't said on my own. The Father who lives in me does these things. Have faith in me when I say that the Father is one with me and that I am one with the Father. Or else have faith in me simply because of the things I do.

I tell you for certain that if you have faith in me, you will do the same things that I am doing. You will do even greater things, now that I am going back to the Father.

Did you Google "the things I do"?

There it is, right in this famous and wonderful passage where, in the midst of revealing that his time on earth is coming to an end, Jesus is revealing to his disciples that He is The Way, The Truth and The Life. The way to Father God – no-one comes to the Father except by me (If you are a God-fearer and do not know Jesus then tremble). Did you see it, in the last couple of lines?

Jesus offers us a way to the Father, to Father God, because Jesus is God the Son, God's son. Jesus is God in human form. The human Jesus had a fixed starting point in time, in Nazareth when the angel spoke to Mary. The Son of God who took on that form was from the beginning of all things. He appeared in Bethlehem and cried like normal babies do when they are cold, wet or hungry. He smelt a bit. He did not sleep sweetly when his teeth started coming through. He dribbled. But as he developed into manhood he knew who he was, both man and God in man.

Jesus gave authority to his disciples, and passed on his work to them. At the end of this extract he then tells Philip that through faith in Jesus he will do the same things that Jesus has done. Then Jesus trumps this with the statement that Philip will do even greater things now that Jesus is going back to his Father.

### Acts 5:12-16

The apostles worked many miracles and wonders among the people. All of the Lord's followers often met in the part of the temple known as Solomon's Porch. No one outside their group dared join them, even though everyone liked them very much. Many men and women started having faith in the Lord.

Then sick people were brought out to the road and placed on cots and mats. It was hoped that Peter would walk by, and his shadow would fall on them and heal them. A lot of people

living in the towns near Jerusalem brought those who were sick or troubled by evil spirits, and they were all healed.

Jesus was not just talking to Philip. He was not just talking to his disciples, though they were the ones who were there when he spoke. Jesus is stating the bold truth that all disciples of Jesus, and that' includes us, will do this. Jesus speaks across the millennia to today, to our neighbourhood, to us. There is work to be done.

**Can I really be like Jesus?**

**Do I have the authority to do as Jesus did?**

**Does Jesus actually want me to be part of his continuing work?**

***Father God, I am challenged by Jesus' words to the point that they seem just too good for me. Can I really even start to do like Jesus? And to be like Jesus? And to continue the work of Jesus? You sent your Son into this world to save me from eternal death, and you call your Church to share this message in the power of the Holy Spirit. Place me where you want me to be. Speak through me by your Holy Spirit that I may share your message of salvation in Jesus with everyone around me. Enable me to speak wisdom and truth in Jesus' name as you guide me, and deploy me in your redeeming, restoring, healing work in his name. This is what you desire of me, and so I place myself totally in Jesus as my guide, my shield, my authority. in Jesus' precious name. Amen.***

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