

The Ministry of Healing at St. Ninian's

I have decided to introduce (strictly speaking re-introduce), a monthly Healing Service on the first Saturday of the month. I believe that we are all in need of "healing" in the broadest sense because we either struggle with issues physical and mental or we are carers for those who do.

However, I think it is important to set out what I believe the charism of healing to be. In rough terms there are two distinct approaches. The first is more accurately termed "faith healing" where the healer "lays hands" upon, say, the broken leg and by the supposed fervour of the prayers of the healer "demands" that God ought to perform a miracle and un-break the leg before an enthusiastic crowd of noisy believers. If the miracle doesn't happen then it means that healer and/or the crowd lacked sufficient faith!

Now, I am not in the business of denying the ability of God to intervene and interrupt the laws of physics as God sees fit. However, this is not my approach. I believe that there is a very important distinction to be made between "healing" and "cure". I am in the business of helping everyone to avail themselves of the sacraments of the church in an effort to produce a healing of the spirit as an aid to dealing with a physical or mental ailment. I am not in the business of trying to downgrade the role of modern medicine. It is not either/or but both/and. The best healing ministry works in harmony with the medical profession for the complete healing of mind, body and spirit. Healing, therefore, is a way of life and the healing ministry is a microcosm of the whole of Christian life and mission. We are, to put it another way, a group of pilgrims at St Ninian's journeying towards wholeness. Healing has to be seen as a natural part of our life together.

My understanding of healing is rooted in scripture and tradition. Healing, for example, played a large part in the ministry of Jesus. Jesus asked us to preach the gospel and heal the sick. We pray on a regular basis for wholeness in this sick and broken world. Prayer is also a fundamental part of our overall approach to healing at St. Ninian's and we are most blessed to have a dedicated group of people who pray regularly for those who ask for such.

As I mentioned above there have developed different traditions about how a specific healing service should be performed. My approach to a specific service is to root its structure firmly within the sacramental tradition of the Church. Supremely there is the Eucharist. Each time we share in the Eucharist God is working through such "ordinary" things as touch, oil, water, bread and wine. In a sense, healing is already part of our church life because the Eucharist is central to our liturgical experience. In every celebration of the Eucharist Christ is reaching out to us with open arms to hold and to heal us. Accordingly, each Healing Service will be placed in the context of a Eucharist.

Of equal importance to one of our new services will be a liturgy that is relevant to the theme of healing. As much as is practical I will attempt to use as many different liturgies as are relevant. Equally important to a healing service is the use of the oil of the sick. Chrismation is the action of anointing (from the Greek word Khrisma, meaning 'anointing') using the aromatic olive oils which are blessed by the Bishop at the "Chrism Mass" held every year when the clergy renew their ordination promises and the Bishop blesses the oils used for baptism, ordination, confirmation and, of course, the blessing of the sick.

At each of our Healing Services, after communion, I will invite anyone who wishes to come forward and be prayed for by the laying on of hands and the signing of the cross on the forehead of the person using the oil of the sick. An equally important sacrament but rarely used by Episcopalians is the ability to receive the sacrament of reconciliation (or confession). Many people carry a burden with them of such proportions that it impedes their ability to become whole again unless and until they receive the absolution that comes.

Accordingly, the Church has made it an obligation on the clergy, via Canon 29, that they be available to hear a person's confession if so desired. At each Healing Service there will be this opportunity if so desired. Finally, I think it is important that you understand that everyone is very welcome to attend even if they are not suffering from any ailment as such. You could be concerned about someone else and that is good enough for me.

The Rector