

# Seasons

Theme based reflections and outreach actions in ministry  
The Word - Inform - Pray – Reach out - Celebrate



## Healing

Inform – The Word – Pray – Reach out - Celebrate

### On healing

Facts, figures and thoughts from Peter Heazlewood

Without even reaching for a dictionary, I could have a go at defining the word 'healing'. So, here I go "Healing – to make well." I'm sure there are many more accurate or correct definitions, but in this instance I'm happy with "to make well".

When first thinking about writing this introduction, I thought my role would be to blast out a whole range of statistics about sickness, about life expectancy and about medical research. My initial approach was that the presentation of these sorts of facts would be the *entire* focus of this section. As my thoughts developed though, I realized that the subject of healing covers so much more than just medical facts and figures. But for those who crave cold hard information, (and seeing this section of *Seasons* is about learning), here's a few things presented by the World Health Organisation that might get us starting to think about one element of the healing conversation:

## Global health situation and trends 1955-2025

### Health of adults

- Infectious diseases will still dominate in developing countries. As the economies of these countries grow, non-communicable diseases will become more prevalent. This will be due largely to the adoption of "western" lifestyles and their accompanying risk factors - smoking, high-fat diet, obesity and lack of exercise.
- In developed countries, non-communicable diseases will remain dominant. Heart disease and stroke have declined as causes of death in recent decades, while death rates from some cancers have risen.
- About 1.8 million adults died of AIDS in 1997 and the annual death toll is likely to continue to rise for some years.
- Diabetes cases in adults will more than double globally from 143 million in 1997 to 300 million by 2025 largely because of dietary and other lifestyle factors.
- Cancer will remain one of the leading causes of death worldwide. Only one-third of all cancers can be cured by earlier detection combined with effective treatment.
- By 2025 the risk of cancer will continue to increase in developing countries, with stable if not declining rates in industrialized countries.
- Cases and deaths of lung cancer and colorectal cancer will increase, largely due to smoking and unhealthy diet respectively. Lung cancer deaths among women will rise in virtually all industrialized countries, but stomach cancer will become less common generally, mainly because of improved food conservation, dietary changes and declining related infection.
- Cervical cancer is expected to decrease further in industrialized countries due to screening. The incidence is almost four times greater in the developing world. The possible advent of a vaccine would greatly benefit both the developed and developing countries.
- Liver cancer will decrease because of the results of current and future immunization against the hepatitis B virus in many countries.
- In general, more than 15 million adults aged 20-64 are dying every year. Most of these deaths are premature and preventable.
- Among the premature deaths are those of 585 000 young women who die each year in pregnancy or childbirth. Most of these deaths are preventable. Where women have many pregnancies the risk of related death over the course of a lifetime is compounded. While the risk in Europe is just one in 1 400, in Asia it is one in 65, and in Africa, one in 16.

Source – World Health Organisation

So, that's an opener and surely plenty of material for much discussion and thought.

At this point, I'll agree with you that it's hard to learn about the subject of health, diseases and sickness without being a little overwhelmed. It's easy to look at the

stats and become despondent. Consider this though – consider the extraordinary work *done and being done by healers* across the world in the past and the present. Consider the miracles of healing that we can expect in the future! Surely this is cause for hope and celebration.

So to be fair, it's only fitting that I identify some of the significant breakthroughs in the business of healing. Warning - This is not based on my own medical training or extensive research. Instead, I encountered an interesting site on the internet (yes, the internet!) that suggests five significant medical breakthroughs. See what you think:

**1. Discovery of a vaccination for smallpox - Edward Jenner - 1796**

In the early 1950's there were an estimated 50 million cases of smallpox each year. That figure fell to 10-15 million by 1967 and by 1979, smallpox was extinct.

**2. Discovery of germs – Antone P Leewenhoak - 1676**

Germs were apparently discovered in 1676, observed for the first time through a microscope by Antone P Leewenhoak. Medicine, vaccines and penicillin all exist thanks to the discovery and analysis of humble germs.

**3. Discovery of Genetics – Gregor Mendel - 1866**

Gregor Mendel's research into genetics was accepted into conventional medicine in 1866. This followed many years of research working with peas. Not only could Mendel work all day with the innocuous vegetable, but he could conclude each day by eating them. Understanding genetics of course has paved the way for extraordinary advances in medical science.

**4. Discovery of Penicillin – Alexander Fleming - 1928**

In 1928, Sir Alexander Fleming observed that colonies of the bacterium *Staphylococcus aureus* could be destroyed by the mold *Penicillium notatum*, proving that there was an anti-bacterial agent. Use of penicillin was first used as a 'miracle cure' for wounded soldiers.

**5. Discovering the X-Ray – Wilhelm Conrad Rontgen - 1895**

During 1895 experiments with electric currents passed through a vacuum tube, Wilhelm Conrad Rontgen noted that a nearby fluorescent screen glowed. When the current was switched off, the glowing stopped. He attributed this effect to previously unknown rays which, X being the symbol for an unknown quantity, he called X-Rays.

So that's one groups view of what they consider to be the five most significant breakthroughs in medicine. Whether they are or not, who knows? What is important here is to recognize that where there is sickness, in most cases, there is potential for healing and restoration. Whether its though science, medicine, meditation or prayer, we naturally seek wellness.

Looking through the list of breakthroughs, it struck me as interesting that many of them were discovered quite by accident. So, whilst science, and healing through science is based around hard and fast physical and certain laws, the development of sciences is essentially complemented by things like observation, patience, meditation (to use an un-scientific word) and in some instances, good luck. It's interesting that there's a clear partnership between the tangible and largely explainable certainties of science and things less tangible or explainable – dare I say it – things spiritual? As a further twist, I'll throw into the conversation the fact that many scientist no doubt would accompany their work with prayer.

Our approach must be to pray for the healing of people who suffer physical sickness – be it in the local, family context or the global context – and we will. We pray for carers and healers, doctors and medical staff, researchers and scientists. A task for us is to respond to issues of physical sickness and disease. It further extends to issues of mental un-wellness.

But maybe the possibilities for healing are far broader than just physical sickness?

If our definition of healing is 'to make well', maybe there are other areas of life we can see that are unwell?

What about relationships – strained and broken – in need of healing? What about satisfaction and contentment in life? What about personal productivity, activity and engagement?

What about times when our faith falters and we stumble in the journey?

Where is healing in these aspects of our lives required? These things are harder to measure than global health trends, but just as important in the whole healing conversation.

So, in focusing on healing, think about physical and mental sickness, but don't limit the possibilities for healing only to these things. Let's shoot for *whole of life healing!* When we pray, pray for wellness where there is none, and healing where it is needed.

# The Word

This part of the Seasons process provides an opportunity to think about clues to healing that exist in the Christian Faith.

## Healing in the New Testament

A study by Rev Gareth Darlow

We often look at stories of healing in the New Testament and think of them as “miracle stories”. For us, illness is treated in sterile rooms by medical professionals.

From a young age we’re taught about germs and how to avoid them. We learn the effects of different substances on our health. We understand the human body as a piece of incredible machinery, and disease as a mechanical problem that can often be fixed when it breaks down.

Today, when we read a story of Jesus rubbing dirt and spittle into the eyes of a blind man, *we know* that rubbing grit into someone’s eye is only likely to produce an angry blind man. So if we’re not careful what we see is “Jesus did something weird and a miracle happened.” The main point of the story becomes “Jesus performs miracles and therefore must be God incarnate.”

Actually, sometimes that is part of what the gospel writer is trying to say. But usually only part. Stories of healing in the gospel go deeper than the physical and the miraculous. They tell us other things, which might echo more in our experience of illness and healing.

Let’s have a look at a healing story, and we’ll pick out a few of the elements along the way.

**Read Mark 5:21-43**

### The Public Approach

*When Jesus had crossed again in the boat to the other side, a great crowd gathered around him; and he was by the sea. Then one of the leaders of the synagogue named Jairus came and, when he saw him, fell at his feet and begged him repeatedly, “My little daughter is at the point of death. Come and lay your hands on her, so that she may be made well, and live.”*

Jairus is a leader of the Synagogue. He holds a position of importance and power in the community. Men like him tend to represent stability and order. Jesus is a teacher with a reputation for shamanic healing who is happy in deserts and on water; places of chaos and instability. For Jairus, to go to Jesus is to lose a certain amount of his honour.

- ***Where in our own society does illness make us vulnerable?***
- ***How do we handle the experience of putting our trust in the hands of those we hope will heal us?***
- ***How do we care for those who are feeling powerless because of their illness?***

### **You're doing this for THEM? Seriously?**

*So he went with him. And a large crowd followed him and pressed in on him. <sup>25</sup>Now there was a woman who had been suffering from hemorrhages for twelve years. <sup>26</sup>She had endured much under many physicians, and had spent all that she had; and she was no better, but rather grew worse. <sup>27</sup>She had heard about Jesus, and came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, <sup>28</sup>for she said, "If I but touch his clothes, I will be made well."*

In this story Jesus heals two women; a widow who has lost everything and a young girl just about to turn twelve (the age of transition into womanhood). In ancient Israel, while a son is the hope of the family, a daughter tends to be a beloved inconvenience. Likewise, for a woman with a hemorrhage to touch a man was to make that man unclean. When she approaches Jesus and touches him, the *righteous* response would be for him to rebuke her.

For Mark, an important part of this story is that within his culture, neither of these women are important. His readers, he might be hoping, will think to themselves... "Wait a minute... Jesus has all this power and he's wasting it on HER?"

- ***Have we ever found ourselves feeling "unclean" because of an illness?***
- ***In our world do we prioritise healing for one group of people over another?***
- ***Are there types of illness that we find ourselves judging?***
- ***Are we sometimes inclined to think of certain people as "unclean"?***

### **The Treatment**

*Immediately (the woman's) hemorrhage stopped; and she felt in her body that she was healed of her disease.....*

.....

*Then he put (all the neighbours and servants) outside, and took the child's father and mother and those who were with him, and went in where the child was. <sup>41</sup>He took her by the hand and said to her, "Talitha cum," which means, "Little girl, get up!" <sup>42</sup>And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age).*

This is where the miraculous kicks in. Part of what Mark is pointing to in this story is Jesus' identity as the Son of God; the one who has the power to dispense health and wellbeing, as only God does. It's also a point in the story of waiting.... believing... hoping...

- ***What must the woman be feeling as she sneaks up to Jesus?***
- ***What must the parents be feeling as he takes their daughter's hand?***
- ***How do we feel as we wait for test results, or to see if the antibiotics kick in?***
- ***How do we care for those who wait?***
- ***How do we give thanks when we are healed?***

### **Finding Normal**

*But the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came in fear and trembling, fell down before him, and told him the whole truth. <sup>34</sup>He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has made you well; go in peace, and be healed of your disease."*

*<sup>2</sup>And immediately the girl got up and began to walk about (she was twelve years of age). At this they were overcome with amazement. <sup>43</sup>He strictly ordered them that no one should know this, and told them to give her something to eat.*

A common factor of Jesus' healing stories is that Jesus sends people on their way. In ancient Israel, illness was twofold. Part of illness was about the physical condition; another part was about the break from the community that came as a result of that condition. Because the widow had a disease involving bleeding, anyone who came into contact with her would be made unclean. Her disease essentially cut her off from her community. This was not unusual. "Lepers" (actually suffering a variety of skin diseases) would be allowed to beg at the city gates during the day, but would be locked out at night. When Jesus heals someone, he is not only restoring their physical health, but also their ability and to function within normal society. Their whole life is being given back to them.

- ***When we have been ill, is it hard to go back to our normal lives?***
- ***When we have cared for someone through a long illness, have we ever found it hard to re-establish them as our equal, rather than our responsibility?***
- ***Are there particular illnesses today which 'cut people off' from society?***
- ***How do we care for those who 'disappear' due to their illness?***
- ***How do we look for the healing not just of people's bodies, but their ability to be part of this community?***

# Prayer

As a Christian faith community, we recognize the importance of spending time as individuals or as a group in prayer – meditating on the grace and power of God to move in the lives of those for whom we pray.

Prayer can take whatever shape or form you wish it to and it is important to understand that whilst you and/or your group are praying, so to are others in our community. It may be that some members of your group don't subscribe to the conventional notion of prayer. Where that's the case, it may be useful to encourage them to spend time thinking about healing and what it means to them and those they care for.

Some may find it difficult to pray or lead prayer publically and that's okay. You may wish to use these words as a guide, or to break the ice.....

*Loving God*

*We bring before you our prayers for healing. We pray for the sick – those who require the touch of your Holy hand. Be with those who are sick. Bless them with healing. Touch them in wholeness.*

*Loving God, we pray for the healers and for those who care for the sick. Be with them as they attend those we love. We look for opportunities in our lives to be agents of healing – chances to be your hands in the restoration of those who falter. Be with us Lord. Walk beside us and beside those who need to feel the touch of your healing hand.*

*In your name we pray*

*Amen*

## Prayer points

The following 'prayer points' are not exhaustive, but may assist in guiding your praying:

*We pray for:*

- *Those people who we know and those we don't who are sick or in need of healing*
- *Healers – including doctors, nurses physicians, surgeons etc*
- *Carers of people who require healing – families, friends and supporters*
- *Decision makers in the provision of healing services - governments, administrators*
- *Those for whom healing is a long road*
- *Those for whom healing will not happen and for whom death is reality*



### **The miracle of silent prayer.**

Consider silent prayer and meditation. As a group or individual, don't be afraid to allow groups periods of silence during which those who are present can allow themselves to focus on whatever they feel is important.

## **Outreach**

We are hopeful that you and your group will decide on some sort of outreach activity (or activities) to complement the theme of 'healing'. The choice of outreach activity and the extent to which your group engages this, is wholly the decision of you and/or your group. It may be as big or as small as you decide.

It is hoped that your group will embrace the outreach part of this process as it presents possibilities for very real positive change for others and as such, represents a critical part of ministry in the name of Christ.

### **Possible activities**

If you're stuck for ideas, here's a brief list of things that you might consider doing as a group or individual. This list is not exhaustive, but may trigger some ideas.....

- Visit someone you know is sick
- Provide a meal for someone/the family of someone who needs it
- Raise funds for a hospital or appropriate healing organization
- Create craft-work for distribution to hospitals or those who would benefit
- Write greeting cards for distribution to residents in a nursing home

**IMPORTANT** - Recognize that in outreach, we are dealing with other people – some we know, some we don't. Ensure that actions we do for other people either directly or indirectly, are done with their permission. If dealing with a person or an organization, obtain permission first. Always respect other people's privacy and right to confidentiality.

## **Create**

You are invited to contribute to the season's topic creatively. This could mean music, artwork, craftwork, poetry, drama etc. How do you respond to the concept of healing creatively? That's a genuine question – (not a prompt for us to deliver an answer). Its exciting here to consider the possibilities for creative response, and once again, groups or individuals are invited to engage in this part of the process in whatever way they feel comfortable.

## **Celebrate**

At the conclusion of the Winter Season and our focus on healing, it would be great for your group to celebrate the journey and any outcomes that have been experienced. Celebration can take whatever form your group wishes it to. It may extend simply to a quiet prayer of thanks, through to a presentation or celebration in worship.

Towards the end of the 'Winter season', the Leadership Group will be in touch to see how you might wish to celebrate.

## ***Finally.....***

We encourage your group to embrace the possibilities of *Seasons*. If you require further information or assistance, please get in touch with one of the Leaders.

Finally, we give thanks to God for the talents and energies of our people.

Coatesville Leadership Group