



Wesley's Chapel
& Leysian Mission

1 July 2018

Preacher: Jen Smith

Hymns:	25	God is here!
	728	O God, you search me and you know me
	736	In heavenly love abiding
	574	Because you have said do this for my sake
	661	Give me the faith

Readings: Lamentations 3.22-33
Mark 5.21-43

“Healing within healing”

Let us pray. May the words of my lips, and the meditation of all our hearts be acceptable in our hearts o Lord our strength, and our redeemer. Amen.

What an extraordinary Gospel we have today – healing within healing – as is often the case in the way Mark tells Jesus’ ministry, we have Jesus already in a crowd, teaching – and then along comes Jairus the important man and ‘fell at his feet’ to beg for his daughter.

Note how frequently Jesus changes direction to respond to need: even in the midst of a crazy, chaotic day sees people one by one, and focuses them one by one. He starts off for the house, taking the crowd with him – pressed so close no one can walk – think of the Northern line from Old Street to kings cross at about ten past 6 on a weekday evening. Crushed in.

And another woman, this one with the long history of failed and expensive quack treatments none of which have stopped her bleeding – she touched the hem of Jesus clothes, and it says she felt in her body restoration.

And you heard the rest. You also heard the words from Lamentations – traditionally the Lamentation of Jeremiah the prophet – in which Jeremiah opens his heart to God – shows both his extraordinary confidence, and frustration.

I want those words to become my words, ‘the steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercy never comes to an end.’

Friends, you and I are today might think of ourselves in this crowd around Jesus – some of us in need of healing, some of us curious, some of us frankly skeptical – all of us with a lament in our hearts – ‘the world is not what I would hope, God – and God I know you are about something better than this - show me a different way.’

SO I want to take us close up to Jesus today, as we prepare to come to his table later in the service. And learn something more about the way he works, build our relationship with him so we too, just like Jeremiah. So that Jeremiah's lament can become our lament - Healing, within healing. This is about a radical grace – the theme of our new President Michaela Youngson's charge to the church, yesterday. Radical grace.

The first word about Jesus will be Journey – his ministry is what happens when he is on the way to do something else.

The second word about Jesus will be joining – he heals in ways that are not about individuals, but about whole communities that are restored to life.

The third word about Jesus will be justice – his attention, his love – comes to all people. Rich and poor alike fall at his feet.

So first, Journey. I have been with the Methodist ordinands on their retreat this last week – they are all being received right now into full connexion at Conference in Nottingham, and they will be ordained later this afternoon in churches all around the Nottingham area.

In the Methodist church in this country we talk about the ordained ministry as 'travelling', after John Wesley's example when he was Superintendent minister here, of staying at City Road in the winter months, but then travelling the chapels and circuits in the summer.

And these ordinands have journeyed.

If you could meet them all you would be so encouraged – by the one who was just coming up to ordination in Sierra Leone when the war came, and had to flee without his family. Then from the UK had to fight to bring his children to join him, from Senegal. His vocation for ministry went on a back burner for another 17 years. Today he comes for ordination here.

Some of them have been teachers, or soldiers. Some are very young, in their mid twenties – some wear clerical dress and some wear t shirts, and some are happy carnivores while one is a vegan. Men and women, single and partnered, normal folks not any different from us, except for this journey they have given themselves to, following the radical grace of God.

And it is a radical grace – something odd strikes me about Jesus – his most important ministry often happened when he was already doing something else. And yet he was not afraid to journey away from people as well as towards them. What about the ones who had made a special trip to hear him teach that day in the crowd. And then he just leaves? And the little girl – she died in the time he took to stop for that unclean woman?

We are a national connexional church which is at a crossroads for its future. We are a church with pockets of growth, like this one – where people are coming not just from other churches, but new to church. And we are a church which loves God nonetheless

than it ever has, and whom God loves. And certainly we are a church which sees around it a hunger for faith – for evangelism – and a need for service.

And we are a church with many many fewer vocations for the ordained ministry, and present ministers more and more thinly spread as we journey. And some parts of our church call out when a minister is taken away, or none is sent – some circuits where there were only five years ago 4 minister, now with one.

These days we would never allow a journeying ministry like John Wesley's.

No circuit would let one of its ministers journey off for six months of the year – evangelism might be great, but who will look after the folk back at home?

Who will do the teaching in the square for the people who made a special trip, while Jesus goes off on some fool's errand to Jairus' house?

Now in Mark, this is typical – it's not just that the author of Mark struggles with his attention span – but he starts one story, then something else very important happens in the middle, on the way, and then he goes back to the first thing – like a sandwich. And usually he then has an aside about the disciples being annoyed with Jesus that he has changed direction, and arguing amongst themselves. And Jesus knew what he was about, even if they did not. Radical grace.

And so not just for our ordained people, like those ones being ordained today, but for all of us. The love of Jesus is not something we have to hoard, it can be given away.

And the second word: Joining.

The way Jesus acts always sees the individual – he notices. He looks at you and if he say 'how are you,' you don't get the sense it is a platitude. And he knows.

And we each need healing oh my we do – just like Jeremiah in his lamentation, and that woman in the square, we need healing. We need to stand in the stream of Jesus' compassion and feel it come upon us and lift us.

And yet, the way Jesus heals brings not just a cure, but a restoration of relationships. He knits people together as part of healing. This woman with the bleeding – she will have been unclean under the law – no one allowed to touch her. Isolated. She touched his clothing – and we hear that she felt in her body a change – a wholeness.

That may have been a cure, but it was not the healing. The healing comes when he says 'who was it, who touched me,' and she came forward. She came into relationship with Jesus – not just using her faith as a private therapy, but risking coming back into community with this crowd, and with Jesus himself. He called her, and he is calling us.

Our healing is deeply personal, but never private – we are joined in the act of building kingdom. We are knit together in the things that happen along our way. As we in church journey together.

And it takes time. Relationships are not built in a day – which is why it is so hard to break them, as with us here, saying goodbye to long ministry from Jennifer Potter. SO we grieve, and we look around and say ‘who will know me, anymore?’ But God has knit that relationship all through this community, and it will continue to grow. We can step out in faith.

And the third word about Jesus’ healing, to help us know more of him: justice.

Do you hear the same phrase used of Jairus, the high status man, and that woman? Both came and fell at his feet.

This Jesus, the one who receives our lament and journeys with us – he does not see as the world sees – he does not count one need as more important than the other. And he is willing eager to break the laws of his tradition to be able to bring healing.

He should not touch this woman. She is unclean, and not just because of the physical difficulty of her bleeding, but there is a deep stigma about her – pitied maybe, but the kind of person people whisper about, a shame attaches to her in her religious community.

Jesus practices a radical grace, a justice – eager to break the tradition of the world, which values you and me on the basis of what we can produce, or the colour of our skin, or our credit rating, or whether we have a traditional shaped family – and teaches us to value ourselves that way too – to internalize the low worth that the world sometimes attaches to us – Jesus is eager to break the tradition of the world for justice. By touching her, attending to her – he is not just stopping the bleeding so she can become acceptable to the community again. He is overturning the stigma. Overturning her rejection. Don’t think for a minute there wasn’t someone in the crowd having a whinge about Jesus doing that.

But this is not new for God, with Jesus – read Jeremiah, and see that God has always been about justice – and especially for those polite society turns away from.

So this Jesus, our Jesus – journeys. And we must journey. Not be afraid to move as we are called.

And this Jesus – joins us to one another. Our healing is not just a private therapy, but a restoration and building of relationship.

And Jesus ministers justice. He spends time and attention and he knows love is not a zero sum game – he does not bother with role, or title or acceptability, he ministers with justice. And as we minister with justice, we will feel the radical grace flow through us as well.

Jesus disappointed many people. He still saved them. But he was not all things to all people. He was building kingdom, not empire. And this meant that in the words of John Wesley, he went not just to those who needed him, but those who needed him most. People did not always understand what he was doing and we still do not.

But he is still our companion – still feeding us – his mercy is still steadfast – never coming to an end – walk with him a little closer, just a little – hold your expectation a little lightly, just a little – and see what will happen. The words of Jeremiah's lament are ours, and he still comes to love and heal.

We will sing as we sit – and remembering the ordinands today on their journey - the taize chant ubi caritas et amor – Deus ibi est – where there is love, there God is.

Response (sung seated, repeating) Ubi caritas et amor, ubi caritas, Deus ibi est.
*Transl., 'Where there is charity and love,
there God is'*