

## *Healing prayer*

Brian McKinlay  
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*Isaiah 53.1-5, Psalm 103.1-5,19-22, Revelation 22:1-3, Matthew 14.22-36*

Jesus had the freedom to disregard the laws of nature and simply walk across the lake. Jesus walking on the water speaks of freedom. Jesus showed that the disciples' destiny, and ours, doesn't depend simply on circumstances like the wind and the waves.

After quite a number of miracles, described in Matthew's Gospel, Jesus was once again demonstrating that the natural world, its rules, and its deepest fears, could be changed through faith.

Such faith does not rely on the material, the earthly, the objective, or even the logical.

To feed thousands from one boy's lunch is impossible, to walk on water is impossible, yet Jesus did these things.

Resurrection is impossible, eternal life is impossible, healing through prayer is impossible, yet it is the truth of the impossible in God that brings freedom.

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

We're taught in Hebrews 11 that faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see. That is, our faith rests in spiritual things that cannot be seen physically. It relies on God's own self, who is Spirit.

Peter was not a coward. He did step out of the boat onto the water, at night, in heavy weather, something more than most of us would dare to do. But he didn't yet have the spiritual eyesight, and hence the faith, to rely on something he could not see, the power of the Spirit of God. "We walk by faith and not by sight." That is why Jesus asked Peter, gently I suspect, "You of little faith, why did you doubt?"

Like the disciples, we struggle to understand. We can't escape from the fact that the Christian life is mystical and that there are mysteries. Paul described himself as a "servant of Christ and steward of God's mysteries." "We speak in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual things to those who are spiritual", he wrote in I Corinthians.

So I find it interesting that just after the wonder and mystery of a series of miracles, just after Jesus had walked on water, no less and the strong wind had been stilled, just after those in the boat worshiped him, saying, "Truly you are the Son of God", they arrived in Gennesaret, and when the people of that place recognized him, the thing that they did immediately was to send word throughout the region and bring all who were sick to him, to beg him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak.

And, Matthew says, "and all who touched it were healed."

Such a humble approach; just to touch his cloak, like the woman with the hemorrhage

Yes, there is mystery and there are questions in healing ministry. There are no simple formulas.

But faith teaches us to humble ourselves, to rest in God, and trust God, despite our lack of understanding. Think now of the people in the Gospels who came to Jesus for healing. All of them were humble, relying on the mercy of God found in Jesus; sometimes beseechingly, sometimes with confidence, but always with humility.

We need to be able to accept a certain amount of mystery. Because of the Word of God and the work of the Holy Spirit, we can often be certain of something in our hearts, our spirits, even though we don't fully understand. Such certainty is faith.

To offer and receive prayer for healing is a question of obedience. James 5.14-16 says: "Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them, anointing them with oil in the name of the Lord. The prayer of faith will save the sick, and the Lord will raise them up; and anyone who has committed sins will be forgiven. Therefore confess your sins to one another, and pray for one another, so that you may be healed. The prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective."

That is a command, or at the very least a strong exhortation. It's not just a polite suggestion. If any among you is sick they should call for the elders of the church, to pray and anoint with oil in the name of the Lord.

Of course some common sense is helpful. We don't need to call for the Bishop just because we have a sniffle in the nose. But it might be good to ask a partner, housemate or friend to make a simple prayer.

The Holy Spirit gives special gifts of healing, gifts of miracles, and gifts of a word of God's knowledge or wisdom. These are described in 1 Corinthians 12, for example. An overall principle is that these gifts are to be used to strengthen the Body of Christ, encourage one another in faith, to express love and to build up.

However simply to pray, the person praying and the person receiving need no special qualifications, no more than they do to pray in any situation.

Keep it simple. Elaborate language is not required. "Dear Lord, please heal my sister. I ask in Jesus name. We trust you Lord. We thank you Lord. Amen." That might be all that is required.

Prayer for the sick is not a counseling session, even when the sickness is emotional, mental or spiritual. There is an important place for skilled counseling, but this isn't it. For example, if someone asks for prayer because of fear or depression, just make a simple prayer asking for comfort and healing, and maybe gently ask if they would if it might be helpful talk to a pastors or another skilled person who might be able to help them.

Please don't put things onto the other person, like, "You must believe" or, you "Must trust God and you will soon feel better."

Similarly, if you are asking for prayer, understand that the job of the person praying for you is simply to pray, to be a friend, and to share God's love with you.

The curse experienced by Adam and Eve in the garden, separated them from the tree of life, the tree whose leaves, it says in Revelation, are "for the healing of the nations".

Jesus overcame that curse, through his death and resurrection.

With all my heart I believe that healing and restoration are part of what was achieved by Jesus through the cross.

"Surely he has borne our infirmities and carried our diseases . . . he was wounded for our transgressions, crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the punishment that made us whole, and by his bruises we are healed." (Isaiah)

Let us not neglect, therefore, a gift for which Jesus gave his very life.