



Module 1 – Week 3 – The experience of healing – 7 June 2022

The topic for this week is the healing ministry of Jesus. An account of this, is the story of the cure of the leper in Matthew's gospel, chapter 8. In Israel during that time, one would not touch lepers. It was considered to be a very contagious disease. Similar to the way, Covid-19 has impacted society wherein it is best to keep a distance. There was much fear around catching leprosy by touching someone with the disease. Yet, Jesus' immediate response was to put out his hand and touch the leper. This was a very powerful moment as nobody would touch a leper. In the Jerusalem Bible's translation it says that "Of course I want to be cured." That reflects the healing ministry of Jesus – *He wants to heal*. It is not an imposition or right or something He feels that He should do but it is something that flows from Jesus' heart.

Across the gospels, there are over 25 accounts of specific miracles of healing. There are actually more, especially when there were large numbers of people being healed. Each one has a human touch (dimension) to it.

Another example, is also in Matthew's gospel, chapter 9:18. Firstly it is a miracle, within a miracle. A ruler has come up to Jesus and said to him "my daughter just died, but you can bring her back to life." While that is extraordinary in itself (bringing someone back to life), it is the miracle that happens in the midst of the story that is also interesting. It is described simply here – Jesus is moving throughout the town and the woman who has suffered from a haemorrhage for 12 years just wanted to touch the hem of Jesus' garment. "Take heart my daughter, your faith has made you well." The woman despite the suffering she was experiencing was driven by her faith. If only I can touch the hem of his garment. It was almost an insignificant thing to just touch the hem of the garment (she was not going to ask Jesus for anything or grab his attention in a particular way) but because her heart was driven with a faith and confidence that Jesus could heal her just simply by touching the hem of his garment. And Jesus acknowledges the fact that it was her faith that made her well, for the miracle to take place.

Jesus has commented in several gospel stories where he says your faith has saved you. Healings come about because of the faith of the person who believes that they can be healed. Faith is the key element in healing. When there is faith, one believes, one asks and one receives. If there is no faith, one does not ask and one does not receive. Faith is critical to healing.

Healing power of Jesus continues in the life of the early church. From the Acts of the Apostles in chapter 3, Peter and John are going to the temple to pray and see a cripple begging at the door. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk..." The cripple then stood up and was able to walk. Peter is conscious that he does not have the power to heal the cripple, but says that the power is from Jesus. Peter knows that he can invoke that healing power.

That is also evident in the life of the church. There are many occasions of the healing taken place in the history of the church and is associated with many saints. There is one saint by the name of St. André Bessett, who became known as 'the miracle man of Montreal.' He belonged to the Congregation of the Holy Cross, but due to frail health it was decided that he would not become a priest but was made a lay brother instead. One of his tasks was to be the doorkeeper of the Congregation and he did that for forty years.

He had a great devotion to St Joseph and would pray for the people that came to talk to him as the doorkeeper. Slowly people were experiencing miracles of healing and this grew over forty years. He had thousands of people who made contact with him to see him for healing. There are over 100,000 miracles connected with St André Bessett. He received over 80,000 letter requests per year for his prayers. He always acknowledged that this was the power of St Joseph who he had a strong devotion to. In 1937, when he died, over a million people were at his funeral. That is just one story of one saint. If a saint is to be canonised, there has to be a miracle associated with them.

Not only are there saints, but also places of healing. The more famous of this for Catholics, is in Lourdes, France. In this miracle in 1858, Our Lady appeared to St Bernadette by a grotto and she told them to dig the ground and a small stream of water started to flow out. Very soon there were miracles associated with these healing waters. Today, millions of people a year travel to Lourdes to bathe in the waters of Lourdes.

A video testimony of Julianna Elaarde was then played who recounted her story of how at the age of 28 years old, she suffered from 'Regional Pain Syndrome.' Her excruciating pain confined her to a wheelchair for eight years. Fifty specialists were unable to help her and her leg was dying and at risk of amputation. Three years into her illness, she decided to turn back to God and started praying the Chaplet of the Divine Mercy. She then made the confession of her life. She felt transformed and started to pray three hours a day, and went to weekly adoration. She prayed for a spiritual healing first and then for physical healing and to accept the possible loss of her leg. In 2008, against doctor's advice, she went on a pilgrimage to Lourdes and went to the Eucharistic Benediction. When the priest lifted Jesus in the monstrance, she felt this pain like an electric current running through her leg that lasted several minutes. She then felt the need to go to the grotto and pray the rosary. While she was praying she was captivated by a tiny light in the sky and felt that Mary was behind the light. She then heard the words in her heart that said "Julie don't worry, everything will be alright, just trust." She was immediately overwhelmed by the love of a mother. She felt she had a relationship with her heavenly mother that she never felt before. She realised she had no pain in her leg and asked for assistance to get up from her wheelchair. She was able to weight-bear on her leg and she was able to walk.

An extraordinary story of not only a physical healing but also a total transformation of her heart. Her faith led her to go to Lourdes, and filled her with such love and gratitude towards God. Healings are about the experience of the love and mercy of God, such that one is completely transformed in their relationship with Him. Healings show the heart of God. Healings reveal the depth of mercy in the heart of God towards humanity. Healings reveal the true nature of God in a way that one can never understand conceptually or intellectually that not only touches the body but transforms the heart and the soul.

Archbishop Porteous then recounted a story of when he was a priest at The Entrance in the Central Coast of NSW. He was preaching on a healing miracle of Jesus and decided at the end of mass that he would stay on the altar and said he would pray over people. Hundreds came forward and he was praying over them for a few hours. A year later, he was celebrating mass and after mass he was talking to people and saw a couple who wanted to speak with him. This couple said that they were at the mass during a holiday over a year ago and came forward for healing as they were unable to have a child and the doctors had given up. He then introduced his wife and their three month old baby. That was one experience that Archbishop Porteous has had that miracles do happen and that God continues to heal. Scriptures reveals this, the tradition of the Church, particularly in the lives of saints and special places like Lourdes, miracles continue to happen.

He then invited everyone to reflect upon moments where one might have experienced the healing power of God. Not only the healing that happened but the effect it has had on your relationship with God.