

# A Parable of Healing

Sermon by the Rev Derek Lightbourne St James and All Saints' March 31 2019

Keynote Bible passage: Luke 15.1 -3, 11b -32

How do you react when you lose something? With despair, frenetic searching, practical action going back to precious actions? Praying? Any or all of these. And when its one's car keys put down without thinking. (Use a lanyard to see them easier, especially when on holiday and in an unfamiliar place) There's a common phrase we may use when finding them – 'I can't see for looking'. There are some biblical examples of this – of Mary Magdalene in the garden after the resurrection of Jesus and mistaking the gardener for Jesus. Or the 2 disciples on the road to Emmaus, not recognising the stranger who joined them. The way Luke tells it – 'their eyes were opened.

May I suggest it can be like this when one reads scripture. How often have you read a passage, and noticed something in it that has previously been overlooked? This has occurred for me in considering Jesus' ministry and teaching on healing. In Order of St Luke there's recognition given of 26 healings of Jesus. Yet in a closer study of Luke's gospel there's other insights on healing which may have been overlooked. For example, how many of us would consider the familiar story of the Prodigal Son, and the loving father, as being related to healing? This morning I'd like to share with you significant insights into this familiar story, and it may be to say 'our eyes are opened' for what we glean about Jesus' insights into healing. (That's the gospel story for today). I mentioned the 26 healings recorded in the gospels. They are mostly of people healed from physical ailments. Today's gospel is of different healing.

Thus, to highlight four insights from Luke's account. You might have noticed the preliminary verses introduce a section on the theme of 'lost' – lost sheep, lost coin and lost son. I'll return to that as the 4<sup>th</sup> aspect.

1) First then I suggest the story of the lost son, the father and the brother can be about *healing of relationships*. Something must have occurred for the younger son to want to get his part of the inheritance early and possibly a repressed upbringing he wanted to 'break out' with all that money and spend it on 'dissolute (reckless GNB) living'. Then of the father, lamenting the son's leaving and looking out for his return. And the other son, on hearing of his brother's return allows his resentment to well up and spill over – 'look all these years I have worked for you like a slave, and I have never disobeyed your orders. What have you given me?..... ' Sounds like issues with his father, and with his brother as he refers to him as '..this son of yours'. Healing of relationships - It sure sounds to be an issue in that family.

Healing of relationships can occur in our own family, and need healing. I remember one such in my own, I never knew what had occurred between my father and his sister (my aunt) many years ago and we grew up have no contact with our cousins of that branch of the family. Thankfully that's not the situation anymore and I regularly stay with one of those cousins. Likewise, it may be for you, where there's strains, hurts, jealousies, and you're aware that healing of relationships needed.

2) Thankfully we can glean some insight into how this reconciliation can happen, a second aspect of healing in this story. Come back to the younger son and when all was spent and he was in a bad place he wanted to come back and having the relationship restored. The gospel translates it as 'when he came to himself, he said,' 'how many of my father's hired hands have bread enough to spare but here am I dying of hunger. I will....' And here it comes, a way of healing of relationships. I call it the *prayer of intention*. Notice what occurred with the younger son, he recognised his plight and resolved for

reconciliation to happen. He worked out a way.... 'I will get up and go...and I will say....' And then to express his regret 'Father I have sinned before heaven and you and no longer worthy to be called your son. Then the story tells us 'he set off and went.....' In other words, he worked out a way towards possible healing of relationship and then took the risk that this would be accepted and he would be restored and consequently the reconciliation. Healing indeed, as he was accepted and forgiven. (Interestingly one might recognise in this healing process that the 12 Step recovery programme for those caught in an addiction looks to be based on this process. There has first to be recognition of the situation. Then to determine a healing process and get help, in coming to the father. Note also he says 'I have sinned against heaven and..... . Note in the recovery programme there's appeal to a 'higher power.'

May I suggest we can apply the prayer of intention in our own family, and at times where it occurs when there's relationship issues in the church family. I've certainly been on that track in ministry experience.

Now to a 3<sup>rd</sup> aspect of healing – and that concerns the older son. What about resentment? What about *healing from resentment*? The son was really filled up with resentment – not only towards his brother ('your son'), and also to his father. And when the homecoming celebration happened it just welled up and he let fly at his father. ('Listen, for all these years I have been working....

Sounds like more healing of relationships is needed here. Even as the father tried to smooth things over: '.... son you are always with me and all that is mine is yours.' Perhaps the father left it a little late to say the words.

So, what do we do with resentment, usually arising from hurts? Resentment when it's there needs to be attended to – i.e. healed, or it may surface in words hurting others, or there's anger needing to be addressed and to recognise there's a heavenly dimension, it was Jesus' concern as he includes it in the story. What's different between the younger son and the older son is that the story is left open-ended – we're not told whether the matter was resolved.

Where it's us one knows it needs attention and indeed healing of relationship. Prayer can help – the prayer of intention before action and prayer for the resentment to dissolve. Words may be needed – a lesson from the father not saying it earlier. One hears 'forgive and forget' – that may be true, especially the forgiveness part but there can be lessons learned from what occurred.

4<sup>th</sup> Earlier in the sermon I made comment on the inclusion of the introductory words. Luke tells us 'tax collectors and sinners were coming near to listen to Jesus...' A brief comment to conclude. There's another aspect of healing – the implication is that Jesus has a message for us in this – that those we might describe as marginalised hear his message. When I did a study of healing in Luke's gospel, I noticed that those of Jesus' day as part of their healing were *incorporated into community*. That then included 'tax collectors and sinners, those with leprosy, and other isolating conditions, and the lone woman at the well. A challenge for the church today has been addressed by Bishop Justin as 'the lost the last and the least'. A positive in this is that the church community can help in being a place where people are welcomed and accepted for who they are. That's the healing role of the church community. Thus, the church could be described as a '*community of the compassionate*.'

In conclusion then this gospel passage has some key insights on the nature of healing, the process of coming to healing and how important are good relationships. Such need and reconciliation are not always easy, yet as one steps out in faith there's a trusting for healing and reconciliation. Can we take opportunity of beginning, or continuing, 'I will go....and I will say...?'