

Prayer and Healing

**Given by Kathy Roberts at All Saint's, Bradford
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Introduction

At the age of 16, sitting in my study one afternoon, and indulging in an adolescent muse, I saw clearly a figure in white.... Although I had never even read the New testament or attended a Christian service of worship, I knew immediately that the figure was Jesus, and I heard the words 'follow me'. and that is what I have ... tried to do. Many explanations of such visions of Jesus have been attempted... but so far as I am concerned, it was an incursion of the Transcendent into my life. (I am told on good authority that sixty percent of all messianic Jews in Israel were never evangelised, but like me, had a vision or something similar.

My conversion was as simple and as momentous as that. ... in the morning I was a Jew and by the evening I was a Christian; not just a Christian, but a Jewish Christian (Hugh Montefiore, later bishop of Birmingham in Hill 2003:62)

Quite startling, isn't it, in its matter-of-factness! While many of us may not have had quite such a clear vision of the Lord, it is likely that amongst us here today, there will be stories of encounters with Love and Radiance and Joy that will be hard to define, but unforgettable and often life-transforming.

Prayer primarily is about encounter with God. Healing is primarily about encounter with God.

Jesus, the person we encounter

It is in Jesus that we encounter God. Colossians in this magnificent hymn to Christ that was read a few moments ago (Colossians 1:15-28) speaks of Jesus as the *eikon* and *pleroma* of God.

An *eikon* from which we get the word Icon was used in a legal document and it briefly summarised the personal characteristics and distinguishing marks of the two parties entering into a contractual agreement.

In a letter sent home to his father, a young Greek soldier sent an *eikon* of himself – a drawing that someone had done of him. So in the same way Jesus is the portrait of God.

But a portrait is two dimensional. Jesus is also the *pleroma* of God. He is not just a sketch of God, or a summary, or a lifeless portrait, but the full revelation of God – in him there is nothing left out. It is the fullness of God that we see – and experience. (Barclay 1975:118)

The Message describes Jesus as “so spacious.... That everything of God finds its proper place in him without crowding.”

And it is into that spaciousness that we are invited, a spaciousness that is always present, always welcoming. Prayer – “a lovely word that has been so deadened by pious use and misuse” – is a way of tuning in to be part of that spaciousness, resonating.

For into that spaciousness, God “the Sender is absolutely and always present and broadcasting. Prayer is the way to make contact with God It is not an attempt to change God’s mind about us or about events. Such attempts are what secularists make fun of – and rightly so.

It is primarily about changing our mind so that things like infinity, mystery and forgiveness can resound within us. It is about changing you, not about changing God.” (Rohr 2009: 102)

The Message says “everything got started in him and finds its purpose in him.”

In Acts we read “In him we live and move and have our being.” (Acts 17:28) God is the very air we breathe, without him we would not exist.

To pray, to build relationship with him, we tune in to his frequency. The more we do that we will find ourselves saying “prayer happened and I was there, more than I prayed today” (Rohr 2009: 102)

Prayer happens – Abram, Mary and Martha

Abram was minding his own business, sitting at the door of his tent when God showed up! He wasn’t doing anything in particular – you don’t in the heat of the day, all you can do is sit.

Mary chose to sit at Jesus’ feet and absorb all that Jesus was teaching. Martha didn’t. There is nothing wrong with preparing a meal for guests, for being busy – but there is also a time to stop, to be in a place where prayer happens, where God shows up.

A Polish Rabbi, Dov Baer, used to say “that a person is like a shofar (ram’s horn – not a vuvuzela – sounded on the Jewish New year as a ritual of awakening). A shofar sounds only when breath is blown through it; we can say prayers only because God moves through us.”

Another Rabbi, Kalonymos Kalmish Shapiro who died in the Holocaust taught that “not only does God hear our prayers, but God also says our prayers through us as well” God’s words become ours. (Lawrence Kushner, 2002:82)

So prayer is less to do with ‘saying prayers’ than it is to do with relationship, from God, to God – caught up in him.

When prayer happens, healing happens

When prayer happens, healing happens. For prayer, as someone said, is being loved at a deep level.

When people are loved at a level deeper than words, healing happens, as surely as night follows day. We all long to be loved, to be affirmed. Agnes Sanford, well-known in the last century as a person who had great gifts of healing, in her book *"The Healing Light"* says:

"If we try turning on an electric iron and it does not work, we look to the wiring of the iron, the cord, or the house. We do not stand in dismay before the iron and cry, 'Oh electricity, please come into my iron and make it work!' we realise that the whole world is full of that mysterious power we call electricity, only the amount that flows through the wiring of the iron will make the iron work for us.

The same principle is true of the creative energy of God. The whole universe is full of it, but only the amount of it that flows through our own beings will work for us." (Sanford1972: 1)

Yes, there are many people who have prayed and nothing seems to have happened. People still suffer and die. There is mystery, there are questions

Francis McNutt a very experienced Roman Catholic who works in the healing ministry, says that whenever people pray for healing, something happens. Often we stop praying before we really should.

Conclusion

On earth, Jesus preached, taught and healed – and was energised by his relationship with God, by prayer.

Paul says in Colossians that Christ is the head of the church, which is his body. He is first in every thing. We open ourselves to God's love, we get caught up in the life of God – God's spaciousness.

Our understanding of prayer moves from 'saying prayers', to being caught up in prayer.

Healing comes because God is praying in us and through us. Our plan in the benefice is to offer opportunities to offer healing prayer on a regular basis – once a month in one of the churches and once a month mid-week. Will you pray for this? Will you, like Hugh Montefiore, like Abram, like Mary, be present to God?

Come into the spaciousness that is offered in Jesus

Be still and know that I am God

References

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