



St Mark's Review

A journal of Christian thought & opinion

No. 223, February 2013 (1)

Promise and Fulfilment

Preaching the Prophets and Luke's story of Jesus

St Mark's Review

No. 223, February 2013 (1)

Promise and Fulfilment

Editorial	v
Preaching from the Minor Prophets <i>Jeanette Mathews</i>	1
Performing Habakkuk <i>Jeanette Mathews</i>	13
Preaching Luke's Jesus <i>Geoff Broughton</i>	17
Lukan Lenten study guide Towards a healing ministry <i>Tom Frame</i>	25
Sample Study Guide Lukan Lenten study guide: towards a healing ministry – week one	31
Preaching conversion in Acts <i>Russell Warnken</i>	42
The Spirit of promise Preaching from Acts <i>David Neville</i>	51
Preaching on Luke–Acts <i>Simon Smart</i>	67
Preaching Luke 15 in different contexts <i>Geoff Broughton</i>	73
'We are entrusted with the ministry of reconciliation, so be reconciled' (2 Corinthians 5:20) <i>Rebecca Newland</i>	80
Open arms (Luke 15:11–32) <i>Sallyanne Hart</i>	85

Talk for the funeral of Tyler Piper from Luke 15	92
<i>Andrew Taylor</i>	
Does theology have a place in pastoral ministry?	95
<i>Rebecca Newland</i>	
Book Reviews	101
A journey into another faith	101
Debating homosexuality and the church	104
Salvation: is it child's play?	105
Good, but not catholic enough	109
Controversy and conciliation	111
Luke, the trinitarian theologian	114
An invitation to think	116
Letter to the Editor	119

Editorial

‘Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near.’

According to Matthew’s Gospel, this is the essence of John the Baptist’s opening proclamation (Matthew 3:2). Mark’s and Luke’s Gospels bear this out: ‘And so John came, ... preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins’ (Mark 1:4). Matthew and Luke record another essential element of the Baptist’s message: ‘Produce fruit in keeping with repentance’ (Luke 3:8).

‘Repent, and then produce fruit in keeping with that repentance!’ Whether they had come out from metropolitan Jerusalem or were from rural Judea, those who went to see and hear John the Baptist should have understood fully his firm injunction to produce fruit. They knew about growing fruit on the vine, good crops and poor returns, vine-dressing, harvesting and the ever-present risks posed by the climate and by predatory animals and voracious birds.

John’s first listeners also knew about the depiction of Israel as God’s vineyard (Isaiah 5:1–7, Psalm 80). They knew about the failure of their own forebears to produce the fruit required by their God in response to his demonstrations of divine mercy and heavenly generosity.

Jesus, in his metaphors as well as in his parables, drew heavily on the imagery of the vine, of vineyards and of people working at different times of the year in the vineyards. He even made a direct link with John’s preaching in the so-called ‘Parable of the Two Sons,’ those who were directed by their father to go and work in the vineyard (Matthew 21:28–32). ‘For John came to you to show you the way of righteousness,’ he said, referring to John’s injunctions to repent, and then to produce fruit in keeping with repentance. The force and effect of Jesus’ words are unmistakable: ‘Do as the Father has directed. It is not sufficient to give lip-service to the Father’s commands; the will of the Father must be obeyed.’

‘Repent, and then produce fruit in keeping with repentance!’ These two injunctions remain central to the messages every preacher should be conveying into the new church year. But for those of us charged with proclaiming these messages in the affluent and increasingly urbanised West, the use of

imagery that depicts the production of fruit is probably more picturesque and poetic now than relevant and polemical. A continuing challenge for the followers of Jesus is to re-present the truths of God's Word while using language our audiences are able to hear and figures of speech which to them become real.

The focus of this issue of *St Mark's Review* is predominantly on preaching the word of God in the current church year, namely, Year C in the *Revised Common Lectionary*. The emphasis in this issue is on Luke's Gospel and the Acts of the Apostles, with two contributions from Jeanette Mathews addressing the mode and meaning of Old Testament prophecy.

In the recent past *St Mark's Review* has presented papers designed to guide and to contribute to preaching during Years A and B ('Fulfilling the Law: Preaching Matthew and Moses' for Year A in *St Mark's Review* No. 216 and "'The Way of the Lord": Preaching the Psalms, Mark and the Catholic Epistles' for Year B in *St Mark's Review* No. 219).

The current issue, like those which have preceded it, draws its contents mainly from the annual preaching seminar conducted by St Mark's National Theological Centre. In this issue of *St Mark's Review* we are fortunate to have an additional paper from A/Professor David Neville which complements his earlier study, "'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me": Preaching from Luke in Year C', which appeared in *St Mark's Review* No. 213.

May you be spiritually inspired and your preaching reinvigorated as you read this issue, and may there be much fruit borne as a consequence of your applying what you learn.

Lukan Lenten study guide

Towards a healing ministry

Tom Frame

We know well that preaching is not an isolated activity. It is, for instance, based on one or more set Bible readings within an act of worship that customarily reflects a particular theme. We expect homiletics and liturgy to be partners in drawing men and women nearer to God and, by implication, to one another. Preaching might be distinct but it is not separate from every other aspect of the communal life of the people of God. And yet, can I suggest many preachers fail to make the necessary connections between their message and its medium with the mission and ministry of the Church. It is as if those hearing the sermon are expected to know where and why and how what they have heard bears upon their own faith and their own discipleship, and on the calling of the Church to proclaim the coming Kingdom and to live as though it were already here. In sum, I am actually lamenting the isolation of preaching from the witness and work of those who believe they are Christ's body on earth.

Tom Frame is Director of St Mark's National Theological Centre in Canberra and Professor of Theology in Charles Sturt University.

This is a sin of omission rather than commission. No-one tries to alienate the sermon from Christian living; it is simply a case of failing to draw the people into the preacher's message and neglecting to provide some practical steps whereby the faithful might absorb what they have heard and give it tangible expression in their lives. My contention is this: it is often not enough to preach to people in the hope that something might stick in their minds or adhere to their souls. Quite apart from those who cannot understand the message and those who hear but refuse to heed the message, the majority do not know *what to do* with the message. Is it a challenge upon which to reflect or perhaps more of an invitation to transformation? Does the message require some specific action on the part of the individual or demand a collective response from the congregation? I am amazed that preachers are willing to assume that the point and purpose of what they are saying is self-evident when often it is not. Perhaps the most damning criticism of any sermon might be – not that it is heresy, which is bad enough – but that the hearers walk away asking 'so what?'

There is, in my view, too great a willingness to dismiss the three-point sermon with its introductory humour, brief introduction, trio of related ideas, and the 'take home' message followed by an evocative prayer. It might be predictable and it might be pedestrian – but its point and purpose are not veiled in complex structure or lost in subtle oratory. The 'so what?' is apparent even if the 'what' isn't that inviting and exciting. A series of National Church Life Surveys of why people *don't* go to Church seems to suggest that one of the leading reasons is preaching: preaching that is boring or irrelevant. Because people in the pews can't press a mute button, they relocate to a place where the preacher can't be heard; they stay at home. This is a tragedy on so many fronts. It is a great tragedy for the preacher who hasn't just been ineffective but who has driven someone away from the worshipping life of the Church and it is a great tragedy for that person who might not be willing to return without some very serious assurances.

So ends this rather long preamble to a presentation that seeks simply to say two things. First, the Gospel of Luke is a wonderful resource for preaching generally but it is a marvelous exposition of the healing ministry of Jesus and, by extension, the healing ministry of those who continue His work among us. And second, that preaching Luke's story of Jesus and teaching about the healing ministry ... can be very creatively assisted and pastorally supported by devising a short guide. I envisage such a guide's serving as

the basis for a study group that might meet for a six week period, such as during the season of Lent, to explore the deeper meaning and the wider application of a series of sermons on the healing ministry in Luke's Gospel.

The conventional approach to preaching a book of the Bible that is divided into discrete portions for public reading over a few weeks or a few months is to follow the lead of the lectionary compilers and to treat each lection as a stand-alone piece of Scripture with its own identity and integrity. This is often a mistake for theological and pedagogical reasons. I am increasingly coming to the view that the lectionary, while a blessing, has too much influence on our handling of the Bible. It is not just that some of the arbitrary divides in the text do not make any narrative sense; we can be directed to focus on the trees while overlooking the fact they constitute a forest. Spiritual healing, emotional healing and physical healing stand alongside the healing of relationships as primary concerns for 'Dr Luke'. Healing grace, binding what has been broken, the restoration of wholeness; these are the central and, in places, the organising themes of his Gospel. However, the force and effect of the stories that give shape and substance to the big themes in Luke can be dissipated because the reader and the preacher are too close to each set text and treat them in a way that highlights detail but fails to illuminate texture.

It is for this reason that I would counsel a thematic treatment of Luke, as a special project every few years, to draw out the critical insights he brings to Jesus' ministry of healing. Yes, the narrative forms of Luke's Gospel have to be respected; the book has to be read from start to finish to understand the origins and destiny of the man Jesus of Nazareth. But Luke's biography, like any biography, has a particular perspective that is more attentive to some details and aspects than it is to others. It is close attention to these things that helps us to appreciate the depth and colour that Luke brings to our picture of Jesus, matters that we do not encounter in Matthew, Mark and John.

In my view, this is a most opportune time for the Church to consider the whole subject of divine healing. In the 1970s and the 1980s, the 'healing ministry' was something associated closely with the charismatic-pentecostal movement. It was another purported demonstration that the spiritual gifts were not exhausted nor did their dispensation expire with the delivery of the canon of Scripture. This was a response to the claim that when the canon was fixed the need for spiritual gifts (which until that time validated

the Church's divine mandate) subsided and most disappeared. When the various renewal movements swept through the Church in those decades, decades marked by dissatisfaction and disappointment that declining faith and diminishing affiliation were not just momentary aberrations or short-term challenges, the assessment of a person's pressing need and the identification of a relevant divine promise were promoted as the essence of the healing ministry. This was just as misguided and mistaken as the view it sought to counter and correct.

In this decade, a time when 'independent studies' have allegedly shown that prayer makes no difference to a person's recovery from illness (and we are surrounded by a range of holistic therapies ranging from the power of positive thinking to overdosing on particular vitamins), the Church would do well to reflect upon Luke's Gospel and its guidance on the nature of divine healing. It would certainly help that generation of Australians (like my late mother who died in 1996) who felt that sickness and disease were evidence of divine displeasure and that confession of a previously unacknowledged sin was the answer. It is much more complicated than that if we read Luke's Gospel closely and carefully.

Such a reading would plainly be helped by a sustained study of the major healing narratives in the Gospel. How might this be done? Let me explain the approach that I took some years ago when troubled that preaching weekly from the third Gospel might not achieve a sound grasp of the healing ministry. Having used the Lenten study books produced by the Anglican Information Office on several occasions and finding their format had much to commend it, I used their structure as my guide. Let me describe them briefly for those who are unfamiliar with them.

Produced over the past thirty years with very little change, these 60-page standard-format books, usually written by bishops, are specifically designed for individual and group use in the season of Lent, starting on Ash Wednesday and concluding on Easter Day, 47 days later. Four examples can demonstrate the range of possibilities: John Wilson focused on the links between Old Testament prophecies and New Testament promises; the edition edited by John Roffey (the only non-Bishop in the series) explored the biblical basis for social welfare and pastoral care; Graeme Rutherford used a series of Hebrew and Christian texts to give expression to the classical spiritual insights of Bernard of Clairvaux; Stephen Hale concentrated

on chapters 11–21 of St John’s Gospel to show the cause and effect of words and deeds in the life of Jesus.

After a brief introduction to the content and explanation of the format, for each day there is a prescribed Bible reading, an identified theme, a suggested reflection and a short prayer. At the end of each week, there is a set of discussion questions that are mainly intended for group use although someone could work through them profitably in private. What is the objective? *First*, to instill a daily Bible reading habit. *Second*, to encourage thoughtful engagement with the text of Scripture. *Third*, to allow the Word of God to speak to the everyday circumstances of the people to God. *Fourth*, to prepare participants spiritually for Holy week. *Fifth*, to help small groups operate as interpretative communities. *Sixth*, to draw out some sustained themes in Scripture – either in one biblical book or across a series of books. *Finally*, to guide prayerful responses to the Spirit’s leading through this exercise.

In my view, every preacher should consider devising a series of sermons that could be strategically supported by the development of such a resource. I took this approach in relation to Luke’s Gospel with special attention to healing. While a student at St Mark’s twenty years ago, I invited congregants from St Mary-in-the-Valley to journey with me into the Gospel and its message via six sermons in the hope that we would together arrive at a fuller understanding of the Church’s healing ministry and a stronger commitment individually and collectively to exercise that ministry within and beyond the congregation. I attended each of the study groups to explain (if needed) the connection between the sermon and the week’s study material, and to provide some context for the sermon I would preach the following weekend.

I concede that this exercise was time-consuming. There was no question about that. But I felt that this investment was worthwhile on several fronts. It made me do some serious work on the third Gospel. It obliged me to keep the ‘so what?’ question in the forefront of my mind as I prepared the sermons and drafted the daily commentaries. It forced me to be conscious of the importance of the parish’s gaining a more biblical grounding in the notion of divine healing, in the hope that this would inform the parish’s outreach and engagement with its fringe members and those who were not yet its members. This wasn’t a good thing to do just because it was a bit different. It was about discerning the *mind* of God so that we would discover the *will*

of God in the expectation of acquiring the resources of the Spirit of God to do the *work* of the Son of God that He might be recognised and embraced.

Plainly, I took a fairly instrumentalist mentality into this exercise and I was quite directive about where I wanted to take the study group participants and what I hoped they would see. It was, in my view, the culmination or perhaps even the fulfillment of the pastoral responsibility of the preacher: seeing through the message to its practical ends. I have used this material since and I continue to believe it was a worthwhile investment of my time and the time of those I have had the privilege to pastor.

What, then, do I want to leave with you from this presentation? You will take from it what you will but I would emphasise the value of a thematic approach to Luke's Gospel and the importance of developing aids to strengthen the connection between believing, belonging and behaving. The preacher's task only ends, in my view, when there is appreciable evidence that the Kingdom is indeed coming nearer and Christ's name is being lifted even higher. To Him be the glory in the Church and throughout the world. Amen.

Sample Study Guide

Lukan Lenten study guide: towards a healing ministry – week one

Healing and reconciliation

The readings for the first week of this study series focus on Jesus' ministry of healing and the overall plan of God to reconcile people to Himself. As these readings draw upon Old Testament prophecy, it might be useful for you to consult a study Bible which includes cross-references and a concordance. A brief survey of healing in the Old Testament reveals a substantial variation in purpose and conduct. It is also important to remember that the purpose of this study series, in addition to helping the parish gain a better understanding of the broader significance of Jesus' ministry of healing, is to prompt the parish to think about the ministry of healing today. There will be a diversity of views but this will assist us in appreciating the complexities of some aspects of this important ministry.

Ash Wednesday – day 1

The birth of John the Baptist

Read Luke 1:5–23

Lent is the time in the Church's calendar when Christians concentrate their thoughts and meditations on God's work of reconciliation with humankind. The Old Testament prophets were sustained by the hope that the relationship shared by the people of Israel with God would be restored to its former intimacy. But this could only be achieved when there was reconciliation and the healing of old wounds. It is clear that God dealt with these people as a nation. If some of the people turned from God, not even the faithful

and devout could escape the consequences of God's condemnation of the nation. The occupation of Judaea by the Roman Army was thought by some to be a sign of divine displeasure with Israel and discord in the relationship between God and His people.

Zechariah was at the high point in his priestly career when he was chosen by lot to burn incense in the temple. A priest could only do this once in his lifetime. Zechariah, a devout and blameless man, was joined by the people outside the temple in prayer. He was evidently praying for reconciliation between God and Israel because the angel who appeared to him said that his prayer for national righteousness had been heard. Zechariah's son, to be called John, would be filled with the Holy Spirit and would prepare the people for the restoration of the relationship with God. There would also be reconciliation between parents and their children.

Old wounds would be healed and the people would experience a healthy relationship with each other and with God. The ministry of John was to point to the need for healing; the ministry of another would bring it about.

Reflect

God's purpose for us is reconciliation: with Himself, with our inner selves, with each other.

Love the Lord your God with all your heart ... ; love your neighbour as yourself (Mark 12:30, 31).

Pray

Almighty and everlasting God,
you hate nothing that you have made
and you forgive the sins of all who are penitent:
create and make in us new and contrite hearts,
that we, lamenting our sins and acknowledging our
wretchedness,
may obtain from you, the God of all mercy,
perfect remission and forgiveness;
through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Book of Common Prayer, Collect for Ash Wednesday

Thursday – day 2

The Annunciation

Read Luke 1:26–55

It is apparent from this passage and the previous reading that reconciliation between God and His people will be achieved with the aid of the Holy Spirit. It would also be achieved by miraculous means. Elizabeth would give birth to John after many years of barrenness and Mary would conceive while still a virgin. The power of God would be demonstrated by His ability to transcend natural law. The birth of Jesus showed that God was not limited or constrained by the world He has made. Indeed, the angel emphasised to Mary that nothing is impossible for God.

Furthermore, divine purposes would be achieved by unconventional means. The people of Israel did not expect the Messiah, the one who would overthrow the yoke of foreign domination and lead them back to God, to be the Son of God. However, Jesus would fulfil the promise that God made to David and sit on the throne of his ancestor forever. Jesus would reign over God's people and restore them to a special place with Him. This reconciliation was permanent because Jesus' kingdom would have no end.

In Jesus, the healing of discord between God and His people would be achieved. God would no longer look with anger at those within his Kingdom. He would forget their evil and their defiance of his laws.

Reflect

I am the Lord's servant (Luke 1:38a). Can I make Mary's prayer my own?

Pray

Dear Lord, We thank you that you have made us your people of St Mary-in-the-Valley and we thank you for St Mary. Bless us, we pray, with her lovely qualities of willingness to hear and to do your will. Make us willing to open our hearts to your love, your healing, your renewing spirit, letting you remake our lives

and use us for your purposes of love. Amen.

The Parish Prayer of St-Mary-in-the-Valley

Friday – day 3

The Benedictus

Read Luke 1:57–79

In the reading for Day 1, Zechariah was struck dumb after he refused to believe that Elizabeth would bear him a son. This was the first instance of unbelief recorded by Luke. It is clear from this Gospel that belief is essential to the fulfilment of God's promises. Zechariah learned this lesson and was later distressed by his lack of trust in the omnipotent God to whom he prayed. Despite his unbelief, Zechariah came to a new and proper understanding of the power and purposes of God and was blessed. His earlier unbelief was not held against him.

Zechariah is over-joyed by the birth of his son and sang to God an inspired hymn of praise to the Lord known as the Benedictus (from the opening word in the Latin). However, the people in the neighbouring district were afraid by what was happening. It seemed that they also wanted to see God's power in their midst but were fearful when it was evident. Their reaction seems to have been prompted by their ignorance of God's purpose. When they ask about John's ministry, they are really asking, 'What is God doing?'

Zechariah reveals that the use of divine power is never without purpose. There are four parts to his prophecy in verses 68–79. The first is thanksgiving for the Messiah; the second foretells a great deliverance; the third explains further the work of John; and the fourth proclaims the salvation that the Messiah will bring.

The theme of reconciliation is again foremost. God will establish a new relationship between Himself and His people. He will bring his people back from where they have wandered and will forgive their rebellion; He will keep His people within in His sight; He will care for them and show mercy; He will allow them to serve Him and to be the means by which divine purposes are achieved; and He will save them from their enemies. The result will be a new people living a new life in the light of God's power and all-encompassing purposes.

Reflect

Unbelief is sin, yet doubt is an element of most believers' faith experience.

You should not believe your conscience and your feelings more than the word which the Lord who receives sinners preaches.

Martin Luther

Pray

Father,
I confess that I have not understood
the fearsome consequences of obedience.
When I am brought to the test of doubt,
steady my nerve and hold me in faith,
that I may sail through heavy seas,
and ride the frightening storm ...

Saturday – day 4

The presentation of Jesus in the temple

Read Luke 2:21–52

Luke makes clear that the people of Israel held various views about death and what followed. Indeed, the disputes between the Pharisees and the Sadducees, which are recorded later in the Gospel, reveals that some Jews believed that this life was all that existed and that life after death was a vain hope.

Those who did not believe in life after death, and the Sadducees were the most notable upholders of this view, were very worldly people who constantly compromised their religious beliefs with social customs and political imperatives. Yet those who believed in life after death were not sure what that life would be like. Some thought that the soul would survive death and come into God's presence; others believed that their earthly bodies would be resurrected. Some believed that the soul would endure and rest in a place called Sheol until reunited with God. There is no doubt, however,

that uncertainty and a lack of assurance about what followed death was a feature of Jewish religion at the time of Jesus' birth.

This passage, which features Simeon and Anna, points to the work of Jesus in transforming the Jewish view of death. Both Simeon and Anna had been longing for God to reveal the means of redemption and the hope of salvation. There is the suggestion in the passage that both people felt that they could face death in the knowledge that God would continue to be with them. Whereas death was once seen as a form of separation from God and a break in relationships with Him, the coming of God's Son would provide for salvation and make death the start of a closer relationship with God. This salvation was not just for the nation of Israel but for all people.

Jesus often spoke of death and the cost of salvation throughout his ministry, and more will be made of this later in this series of studies. The point to be made here is that the coming of Jesus would remove the fears and anxieties associated with the uncertainty of death.

Reflect

If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this.

CS Lewis

Pray

Jesus remember me, when you come into your Kingdom.

Sunday – day 5

Preparing for reconciliation

Read Luke 3:1–17

The ministry of John the Baptist was always to be a finite one. John's whole being was a sermon. He was to go ahead of the Lord, make the people aware of their spiritual needs and emphasise the nature of the salvation that was to

come. Such was the spiritual poverty of the Jews that God needed to show them the extent to which they had departed from following his laws, and the magnitude of the rupture which they had caused in their relationship with Him.

John stressed repentance. The Jews had to acknowledge their rebellion against God's laws and their dishonouring of His name by the way in which they conducted their worship and lived in the land he had given to their ancestors. The Jews could not have a relationship with God that did not recognise God as their Creator and Sustainer. God could not bless them or extend mercy to them when they refused to ascribe to Him a proper place in their national affairs. John also continued the theme that salvation was not limited to Israel alone. God would be reconciled to all people who acknowledged His Name and authority.

The teaching of John showed that the state of the heart was crucial to God. It was not sufficient for people simply to avoid evil. John implores them to do good. These themes are taken up by Jesus and given fuller expression. But John is pointing out here that those who long for the salvation of God will show kindness and mercy. They will reflect the goodness of God in their lives during their dealings with other people. They will be empowered, proclaims John, by the Holy Spirit in which they will be baptised. They will be reconciled to God and work to reconcile others with Him also.

Reflect

He that hath promised pardon on our repentance hath not
promised life `till we repent'.

Francis Quales

Pray

Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on
me a sinner.

The Jesus Prayer

Monday – day 6

Fulfilling the promises of old

Read Luke 4:14–30

Jesus saw His ministry as one of reconciling people with God. Luke records that Jesus first preached in the synagogue at Nazareth. It is important to note that the text of Isaiah was handed to him and that he decided to read from what we know as chapter 61 of that book. He used the passage from Isaiah to make two crucial points. First, he wanted to emphasise that he was the Messiah, the Anointed One of whom the prophets had spoken. The coming of the Messiah would be accompanied by signs and wonders. This was the mark of His authenticity.

Second, he needed to clarify the nature of His ministry. Many in Judaea thought that the Messiah would be a mighty warrior and resemble David from whose house he would come. To avoid antagonising the Roman administration which occupied their land, the Jews secretly hoped that the Messiah would free them from Imperial bondage and return them to the happy and holy days the nation enjoyed under David. However, Jesus' ministry was neither political or military in outlook.

The words from Isaiah prophesy of the Messiah's ministry to people in distress: the poor, the captives, the blind and the oppressed. Jesus' application of these words to Himself shows that the sense of vocation that came with the heavenly voice at His baptism remained strong. Jesus saw himself as coming with good news for the world's troubled people and with healing to those who were afflicted.

The people in the synagogue were outraged by His words which they did not believe. As they were evidently aware that he had performed miracles earlier at Capernaum, he anticipated their demand that he perform a miracle among His own people and refused to do so. Because the Nazarenes wanted proof that He was the Messiah to overcome their unbelief, Jesus could not perform any miracles in His home town. When he left the synagogue in Nazareth, he never returned.

The link between belief and the working of divine power is made plain by Jesus whose healing ministry was also foreshadowed. He would not help the strong to be stronger but would show the weak and afflicted the abiding love and compassion of God.

Reflect

The healing acts of Jesus were themselves the message that He had come to set people free. The Church is the continuation of Jesus' saving power in history. Is healing still the most convincing demonstration to most people that God is with us?

Pray

Now Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal through the name of your holy servant Jesus (Acts 4:29, 30b).

Tuesday – day 7

Jesus fulfils the promise of reconciliation

Read Luke 7:18–23

Soon after Jesus began His ministry, two of John's closest followers were sent to Jesus with a message. John was probably aware by this time that his own ministry was coming to an end. He was hated by Herod whom he had denounced for marrying Herodias, the wife of his half-brother Philip. Herod feared a revolt against his rule and later imprisoned and executed John. But by this time, the people were already asking questions about their spiritual condition and the ministry of the Messiah.

It is apparent that John sent his followers merely to confirm what he believed about Jesus. Jesus had already cured many people of diseases and afflictions. He had cast out evil spirits and granted sight to those who were blind. There seemed to be nothing over which his authority did not extend.

In reply, Jesus points to His deeds. He means them to be seen as the sign of His authority and a reflection of His power. It is notable that Jesus mentioned in his reply to John that the dead are raised and the poor have had the Gospel preached to them. Jesus' healing ministry was not to be considered in isolation from his message. While not everyone was sick or lame, Jesus' good news was for everyone, the poor in spirit included.

Reflect

Is the point of healing merely to be a proof-factor for human intellect, or is it God's mercy reaching out to the sick?

Pray

Lord, it is dark.
Lord are you there in my darkness?
Where are you Lord?
Do you love me still?
Or have I wearied you?
Lord answer, answer.
It is dark ...

Michael Quoist

Group discussion

1. It is important that the group members get to know one another. If this is the first time that some members of the group have met together to discuss the Bible, invite each member to speak briefly about his or her background and experiences as a member of our parish.
2. As this study examines the ministry of healing, we need to explore our experiences and expectations of God, our parish and ourselves.
 - a. How much do you know about the ministry of healing?
 - b. What do you understand by the word 'healing'?
 - c. Have you experienced some form of ministry of healing either as someone praying for healing or who has sought healing?
 - d. Is there anything about the ministry of healing which makes you feel anxious or uncomfortable?
 - e. What do you hope this study series on healing will achieve?
3. This study focuses on Luke's Gospel and the New Testament generally but Jesus saw Himself as the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy.

- a. Was a ministry of healing performed in the Old Testament?
 - b. If God did heal in the Old Testament, what was He trying to achieve? Was it simply to make sick people well?
4. Luke's Gospel highlights the differences between popular expectations of the Messiah and the ministry of Jesus.
- a. Did Jewish understanding of Messianic prophecy include the hope that the Messiah would heal?
 - b. Did the Jews expect the Messiah to prove His divinity by healing?