

and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.” After blessing the person the priest says, “Go in peace, for the Lord has put away all your sins, and pray for me, a sinner.” This wonderful and joyful ministry of Confession or Reconciliation, in absolute confidentiality, is a means of God’s grace and gives much relief, available for us all.

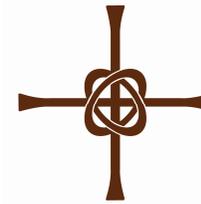
What we do at the Minster? On the fourth Sunday of each month the laying on of hands with prayer and anointing is available for everyone immediately after returning from the altar having received Holy Communion. At the Offertory two Lay Pastoral Assistants or members of the congregation invited by the Rector, together with two assisting priests come around the Altar for the Eucharistic celebration. After receiving Holy Communion they go to the chapel of All Nations. After receiving Holy Communion all are welcome to come to receive prayer and the laying on of hands with anointing. The lay people and the priests minister to each other, reminding us that we all need God’s healing. This is now an integral part of our Eucharistic celebration. People come for this ministry for all sorts of reasons. These include health worries, having to go into hospital for an operation, being diagnosed with a serious illness, concerns about other members of the family, difficult relationships, having to cope with anxieties, and carrying hurts and resentments that are difficult to let go of. The ministry of healing is not a magic wand! Through it the grace of God helps us to be aligned to his will, helping us to be more open to whatever deep and inner healing is necessary for our wholeness, reconciling us to his love for us in Christ.

The Rev’d David Hayes

The Ministry of Healing at The Minster

Meditative Eucharist with Prayers for Healing at 6pm in Ivy House on the 2nd Sunday of the month

Prayers for Healing during Sung Eucharist at 9 30am in the Minster on the 4th Sunday of the month



The Minster Church of Saint Denys, Warminster

The Ministry of Healing

What is healing? Today many of us are preoccupied with health and wellbeing. Some people spend vast sums of money on health treatments of various kinds to retain their youthfulness and attractiveness. Despite its shortcomings the NHS provides an amazing level of health care and medical expertise that would have been unthinkable a hundred years ago. How fortunate that we live in a twenty first century Western industrialised society, rather than in the poorest areas of our planet where one in four live in abject poverty and life expectancy is low. We live now, rather than in previous centuries when life could be short and very harsh.

The great medical and technical advances that we enjoy can so easily make us assume that if only more money could be allocated to research into illness then there would be no more cancer or other life threatening illnesses. If only more could be done then we could live even longer on average that we do now. This way of thinking does not face the reality of our brief time here; we are born, grow to maturity, grow old and die, as Shakespeare’s ‘seven ages of man’ remind us. We have a body appropriate to our age and gender – we cannot, nor should we, have the body of a twenty year old when we are eighty! Our body expresses who we are at each stage of life. The biblical view is that God has given us life as a precious gift. None of us has chosen to be born. Why am I who I am, rather than someone else, say in China or India? Why was I born now rather than in a previous era? These questions raise for us the mystery of our creation. Current research into our genetic make-up heightens the wonder of our uniqueness, bearing the pattern of God’s nature at the core of our being.

So what is Christian healing? It isn’t a magic wand when conventional medical treatment or alternative therapies have failed us. Any of us could be told that we have a terminal illness and only have a few weeks to live. The Church’s ministry of anointing with prayer and the laying on of hands is powerful. Those who ask for and receive this ministry are given the healing power of Jesus Christ, surrounding them with God’s love and deep peace to cope with whatever lies ahead on their particular journey. Christian healing is profoundly about wholeness in all our relationships, with God, with each other, with the earth and within ourselves. We need healing when we are in physical pain and distress; we thank God for the gift of drugs, and for the hands of

surgeons as the hands of Christ, whatever the personal belief of surgeons! We also look for healing that is deeper than drugs or surgery, a healing that neither the NHS nor BUPA can give us; when we are deeply hurt in relationships, when someone close to us dies, when we need God to deliver us from resentments from the past. We need healing when we are worried about someone we love, or when we cannot see the way forward during a difficult time in our lives, before an operation, or tests, or simply are at odds with ourselves, everything and anything!

Healing in the Gospels: In the very different world of first century Palestine Jesus came to proclaim the coming of the Kingdom of God. He came to herald God's rule of peace and justice in which creation and humanity is brought into harmony with God. Jesus demonstrated the coming of the Kingdom through his ministry to those in need and challenging evil forces. People experienced God's compassion flowing through him. He was concerned to heal at the deepest level of humanity, as the parable of the ten lepers in St Luke's Gospel so vividly showed. Ten lepers came to Jesus asking to be healed. He healed all ten of their leprosy and off they went. One turned back to thank Jesus. In dismay Jesus said, "Were not all ten cleansed? The other nine, where are they?" To the man who thanked him he said, "Your faith has saved you." In other words only one of the lepers was truly healed, in the wholeness of his relationship to God that enabled him to thank Jesus. In his parables Jesus teaches us about God's healing. A parable is a story drawn from nature or daily life, designed to teach a simple but deep truth about our relationship with God. St Luke gives us one of the greatest parables of Jesus, the well known parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15.11-32). The son who has squandered his father's inheritance in the flesh pots of a foreign city ends up destitute. He decides to return home expecting a heavy rebuke from his father. Instead, his father welcomes him with open arms. "This son of mine was dead and has come back to life; he was lost and is found." The father then calls for a great party to celebrate this son's return. The healing of Christ has within it the joy of God, the hallmark of true healing. The parable of the prodigal son ends with the angry resentment of the elder son at the celebration for his wayward younger brother; it is the elder brother who is in real need of God's healing, to let go of his deeply held resentment against his brother. What burdens of resentment do we carry with us from the past that only God can deliver us from? In St Mark's Gospel (2.1-12) a severely disabled man is brought to Jesus by four friends who can't get near because of the crowd in the house where Jesus is teaching. They broke open the roof and lowered him to Jesus on ropes. In restoring this man to health as a sign of God's kingdom, Jesus says to him, your

sins are forgiven. Not exactly what he asked for, but what he needed – and received!

St John's Gospel gives a very different perspective of Jesus' ministry. All that Jesus says and does is transfigured with the glory of God. In Chapter nine we read of the cure of the man born blind. In a beautifully crafted scene the dialogue is passed between Jesus, the blind man who is cured by him, his parents and the Jewish religious leaders. The narrative goes beyond the man receiving his sight to show our need to have the eyes of our soul opened to God, and to Jesus as the light of the world.

Sooner or later, of course, we have to face death. This is when the ministry of anointing enables us to be embraced within the love of God, which exceeds all other loves.

Healing in the Church. The letter of St James is the earliest record of the Church's ministry of healing. "Is any among you sick? Let him call for the elders of the Church, and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick man, and the Lord will raise him up; and if he has committed any sins, he will be forgiven." James 5.14-15.

On Maundy Thursday in the Cathedral the Bishop blesses oils for use in parish churches, including the oil for the sick. The *Revised Catechism* explains: "The sacramental ministry of healing is the ministry by which God's grace is given for the healing of spirit, mind and body, in response to faith and prayer, by the laying on of hands, or by anointing." As a sacramental ministry it is a priest who anoints, and the words of anointing used by the priest encompass its meaning: "N, I anoint you in the name of God who gives you life. Receive Christ's forgiveness, his healing and his love. May the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ grant you the riches of his grace, his wholeness and his peace." In the dark days of Stalin the Russian Orthodox priest Sergei Bulgakov wrote, "Anointing may bring either a return to health or the increase of strength necessary to a Christian death, hence the sacrament has two faces: one turns towards healing, the other towards liberation from illness by death."

Christian healing is about wholeness, and also reconciliation. In the sacramental ministry of confession the person tells to God, in the presence of the priest who represents the whole Church, the burden of their sins and sorrows. After giving counsel the priest absolves the person in words from the Book of Common Prayer order for *The Visitation of the Sick*: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, who has left power to his Church to absolve all sinners who truly repent and believe in him, of his great mercy forgive you your offences; and by his authority committed to me I absolve you from all yours sins, in the name of the Father,