

TUESDAY COMMUNION

"Forgiveness and Freedom".

Hymn: 134 Forgive our sins as we forgive!

Reading: Luke 5.17-25

Prayers:

The story ends with the people glorifying God and saying to one another, "We have seen strange things today!"

The Greek word for "strange things" is "paradoxos" meaning something unexpected, almost frightening, as well as wonderful. Who would have thought that a wandering preacher and healer would have done what he has done or said what he said.

What power is at work through this man?

Luke uses the story in Mark's Gospel as the basis for what he writes. Yet, as so often, he makes his own contribution to enabling us to understand more clearly what is happening. He tells us that "the power of the Lord was with him to heal", in Jesus the power of God is present and the power of God is the source of healing.

Whenever we come to stories of healing in the ancient world and there are stories not only from the Gospels but from Christian and other traditions as well we are conscious that we are handling material from a pre-scientific age.

Yet, I would suggest that the relationship between God, the healer and the person needing to be healed is, even in our day, still important. In this story of the paralysed man whose friends believe that Jesus can help him we are meeting with men who are responding to the teaching with faith. Here are people who are already receptive to what Jesus is offering.

The paralysed man does not speak but Jesus does. Seeing the faith of his companions he says to the paralysed man, "Friend, your sins are forgiven."

In two ways, it can seem an unexpected thing for Jesus to say.

First, why should he call him friend? Is it because God always sees the person in need as a "friend"? Is it because our human weakness always draws from God a warm response?

Secondly, why should Jesus declare his sins forgiven when he hasn't even outwardly confessed to anything?

It could be that Jesus has the sensitivity to recognise that the man is wracked by guilt and that his guilt is causing his paralysis. We know well enough that there is a link between our minds and our bodies, even if this is an extreme example!

Yet, it may also tell us that God doesn't wait for us to make a full and complete confession of our failings before he, perhaps grudgingly, chooses to forgive us. Rather, his forgiveness is always on offer and the question is whether we will accept it.

There is, of course, that question that those who interpret the law feel bound to ask. If God alone is able to forgive sins what right has Jesus to do this?

In a way Jesus does not answer their question. In another way he does, and does so dramatically. The proof of whether he speaks in the name of God is to be found in whether his words can be matched by his deeds. Can the forgiveness he offers in the name of God set this man free so that he can walk again?

Of course, we know the answer!

The man, in that famous saying, takes up his bed and goes to his home. We sense a profound physical, mental and spiritual freedom descending upon that man.

The Gospel is about the power of God to set people free, to live that life that doesn't screw us up as human beings into tight knots of guilt or leave us flabby creatures who have the power neither to speak or act with wisdom or love.....

The Gospel is about us having the life to walk as the daughters and sons of God and to be "at home" with him both in this age and in eternity.

In our communion today Christ sees our faith, our trust in his power to give new life, to heal us and free us from that which prevents us enjoying abundant life.

He invites us to be the faithful friends who help others to meet the one who still offers freedom and peace to the world.

Still he calls both them and us, "Friend!"

In the name of our friendly, life-giving God.

Amen.