

## Acts 9

<sup>36</sup> In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (in Greek her name is Dorcas); she was always doing good and helping the poor. <sup>37</sup> About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room. <sup>38</sup> Lydda was near Joppa; so when the disciples heard that Peter was in Lydda, they sent two men to him and urged him, "Please come at once!"

<sup>39</sup> Peter went with them, and when he arrived he was taken upstairs to the room. All the widows stood around him, crying and showing him the robes and other clothing that Dorcas had made while she was still with them.

<sup>40</sup> Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and prayed. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up. <sup>41</sup> He took her by the hand and helped her to her feet. Then he called for the believers, especially the widows, and presented her to them alive. <sup>42</sup> This became known all over Joppa, and many people believed in the Lord. <sup>43</sup> Peter stayed in Joppa for some time with a tanner named Simon.

## John 10

<sup>22</sup> Then came the Festival of Dedication at Jerusalem. It was winter, <sup>23</sup> and Jesus was in the temple courts walking in Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>24</sup> The Jews who were there gathered around him, saying, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Messiah, tell us plainly."

<sup>25</sup> Jesus answered, "I did tell you, but you do not believe. The works I do in my Father's name testify about me, <sup>26</sup> but you do not believe because you are not my sheep. <sup>27</sup> My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. <sup>28</sup> I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one will snatch them out of my hand. <sup>29</sup> My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand. <sup>30</sup> I and the Father are one."

Our God is indeed a God of surprises  
And the surprise is often more down to us than Him  
It's all about our expectations

so often we are looking in one place  
When the Lord pops up  
from an entirely different direction altogether!

Take this week for instance  
He must think I'm terribly thick  
I've been scratching my head all week  
to get a message from this morning's gospel reading  
When it's been right here in the Acts of the Apostles all the time!

Unfortunately, I was unable to go to the Healing Forum last week  
But by all accounts it was well worth the short trip over to Locking

My colleague Matthew Thompson – Bishop's Healing Advisor  
Is always good value – and last Saturday was no exception

Alan brought back a handout with the main thrust of his talk  
And I must say, from what I've read ,  
what Matthew said  
Is very much in line with the main thrust of Jesus' ministry

As I've said many times before, Jesus knew what He was doing  
just about everything He did and said in His ministry on earth  
Was done for a deliberate reason

Every healing seemed designed to tell us something  
both as a sign and as a symbol

And as Matthew explained  
A sign points us to somewhere (or someone) else  
A symbol is an integral part of that person

I'll come back to Matthew's notes later  
But let's first take a look at what's happening here in Acts 9

I think we'd all agree,  
that raising someone from the dead is a bit of a miracle  
it's not the kind of thing that happens every day  
or we'd have a healing ministry team  
permanently camped up at the crematorium!

and whilst we may come to expect pretty amazing things  
**when Jesus is around**  
when it happens through Peter, we have to readjust our thinking  
It's all about our expectations

one might be forgiven for thinking for instance  
that only Jesus could raise the dead

that we might be able to drive out a few demons  
perhaps even fix the occasional case of IBS or tonsillitis  
but that for the more radical cases,  
only the Almighty in person will suffice

and yet – and yet - just a week ago  
we heard of his threefold pardon & commissioning  
now we read of Peter raising Tabitha from the dead

Peter - who surely wondered if he'd blown his chances for good  
Suddenly finds himself at the heart of God's very will and purpose

once again any doubts we may have  
about the limits of our own ministry  
are blown clean out of the water  
by our God of surprises

but then, didn't Jesus say  
"whatever you ask in my name..."

and didn't He say something about  
doing even greater things than Him?  
It's all about our expectations!

This is truly mind-blowing stuff  
That we, mere mortals, could do even greater things than Jesus  
But it's a fact  
And perhaps this is where it begins, in Acts 9  
And It's all about our expectations

The first thing to note about this is how Luke describes Tabitha  
As a lady who was always doing good and helping the poor

It's almost as if he's asking the same as we ask  
When someone dies  
"Why do the good die young"?  
and we all get terribly self righteous  
and judge God as being unjust

such a judgment on our part should come with a warning  
if we begin to go down that route  
how do we begin to ask God to heal someone  
if we think He made them sick or dead in the first place?

Again - It's all about our expectations  
Why on earth would a God who imposes such diseases  
be remotely interested in making us whole again?

Lesson one  
always remember - our God is the God of life  
He created life – and He wants us to have life in abundance  
To the full, packed down and overflowing

So Peter and his men hear about Tabitha and set off for Joppa  
And I can't help wondering, when Peter begins the short journey  
What *he* was expecting?

was he thinking  
"well, we'll just lay hands on her and see what happens"?

or was he so totally confident of Jesus' promise  
that he knew, whatever he asked for would be granted?

And when he gets there, he sends everyone out of the room  
Why?  
Is he just a little nervous that this might not work?  
So he gives himself the breathing space to think of plan B?

I speculate of course  
But one way or another,  
we tend to treat the whole business of healing  
with quite some reservation

With God there is no plan B  
God already knows His plans for us  
And when our prayers appear to go unheeded  
It's simply because we misread plan A!

It's all about our expectations  
I know some people for instance  
who'd never dream of asking the Lord  
to heal them of a common cold  
they'd say, "that's far too trivial"

but then at the other extreme  
who'd even begin to pray for a resurrection?  
It's all about our expectations

Once, when I was hospital chaplain  
I was called to ITU, to a young man  
Whose brain, believe it or not,  
had been poisoned by a tooth abscess

his parents had been told there was no hope  
so they called for the chaplain

I was half-way through praying God's blessing on him  
When in through the door burst a born again  
death-defying  
bible-beating paranormal wonder-woman  
who in her haste to get started on the poor lad  
almost knocked me flying!

I have to admit – my feelings were running hot and cold

I was angry – “who is this woman? Does she know who I am?  
How dare she muscle in on my patch – I'm the hospital chaplain!

On the other hand though, she made me feel quite ashamed

Was I so lacking in faith that I couldn't pray for this life back?

Was I too weak to try being super-spiritual  
like wonder-woman here?

Or was I just being super-pastoral  
respecting and protecting the breaking hearts  
of this boy's parents?

Sadly. Wonder-woman's prayers weren't answered that day  
And she left, almost as dramatically as she'd arrived  
leaving me with the grieving parents

And a lot of unanswered questions  
Both about my faith and God's mysterious ways  
Why some are healed – even from the brink – and others are not

Then there was another occasion, not long after that  
When a dear member of our church at Emmanuel died of cancer  
And I received a call from the funeral director late one evening

The family had turned up as arranged  
For a viewing in the chapel of rest  
but then they totally spooked him  
by singing hymns and praying for a resurrection

having assured him that I knew this family very well  
that they were perfectly sane but deeply committed in faith

I put the phone down – and again I wondered

“why am I not down there, praying with this family?  
am I, unlike them,  
ashamed or embarrassed of what people might think of me?”

or again – was it about our expectations?

Again, this family's prayers weren't answered  
at least not in the way they might have expected  
God's ultimate Plan A had been put into action  
dear Dulcie had been transported from her frail diseased old body into the never ending banquet of  
His Kingdom  
but it didn't stop them from asking.

And so I come to my question for you this morning  
Why don't we ask for healing more often?

Why – when Jesus promised “whatever we ask in His name”  
and that we can do “even greater things than Him”

Why do we settle for same old same old?  
When God wants us to have *life in abundance*?

Forgive me for sounding like Uncle Albert  
“When I was hospital chaplain”  
but it was a time when I thought and prayed a lot  
about Christian healing

I'd love a pound for every time a patient told me  
They were longing for things to get “back to normal”  
Back to the everyday routine  
In other words – back to the same old same old

Why?  
I mean – I can understand when things go dreadfully wrong  
We begin to appreciate the everyday things we take for granted  
But God wants us to have so much *more*

I know, here at St Paul's  
there used to be healing ministry  
after church every Sunday morning

I don't know why it stopped  
But I can take a wild guess  
That it comes right down to expectations

We have the same problem over the hill at St Peter's  
our prayer ministry team is on duty every Sunday morning  
and yet hardly ever  
do they find one person wanting to pray with them

Why?  
why don't people ask for prayer ministry?

let me deal with some of the things people say

One: “God's got the Boston bombers to deal with  
Then there's that big fire in Texas  
Then there's Libya and Afghanistan and North Korea  
He doesn't want to be bothered with silly things

Like my sore throat”

PLEASE don't think God can't be bothered  
NOTHING is too much or too little for Him

Listen to Jesus...

“Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish,  
will give him a snake instead?”

Listen to Jeremiah

“I know the plans I have for you, declares the LORD, plans to prosper you and not to harm  
you, plans to give you hope and a future.

another thing people say about healing prayer

“I prayed once, and God didn't answer me”

PLEASE – just because He hasn't answered your prayers  
in exactly the way you asked Him  
please don't think He hasn't heard you

Coming back to Matthew's notes from last weekend

First and foremost we need to remember  
that this is *Christ's* ministry - Not ours

He may not always do things the way we expect  
but one thing I can assure you,  
it will be the RIGHT way  
not only for you but quite probably for someone else somewhere

we also need to remind ourselves that God's *timing* is perfect  
He may not be saying “no”  
He may simply be saying “not yet”

God's ways and God's timings - are mysterious  
And all He needs is from us  
Is to be *patient* and to trust Him

Both those waiting for healing  
and those who are instruments of it  
all need to know that God's ways are faithful and just

and – as Matthew said last week –  
healing is core to His being

It's God's default mode to heal

Remember when Jesus wasn't acknowledged in His home town?  
And Luke wrote  
“all He could do was to lay hands on a few people and heal them”

the very least He can do – when all else fails – is to heal

remember the woman who'd bled for years  
and touched the hem of His coat?

He didn't even see her with the crowd pressing in on Him

And yet He knew the healing power had left Him

Jesus can't help healing – it's as integral to His way of things  
as these bodies He created for us

when we cut ourselves – the blood flows immediately  
to cleanse the wound  
to form a natural plaster  
to protect the cut until a fresh skin grows beneath it

even in nature, God's earth heals itself  
(Holyport interchange J8/9)

Healing is part and parcel of God's creation  
Even the tide washes our beaches twice a day

So – let me refer back to Matthew's notes from last weekend  
(and this is important to both patient and healer  
and – by the way - if you want copies I have some for you)

**first** - as I've already said, Healing is God's default,  
it's His ministry to us all

**two** - Jesus wants to meet us all at our point of need.  
Whether physical, emotional or spiritual,  
He wants to make us whole

**three** - If it doesn't happen instantly,  
maybe we need to look at things in the context of eternity.  
Maybe we got it wrong – not God  
With God there is no plan B!

**Four** – when we pray for healing  
we need to have faith that it will happen  
even if we can't necessarily feel or see it  
**five** – the fact that Peter could raise the dead  
would indicate that healing wasn't exclusive to Jesus  
it didn't end when He returned to the Father

we can still ask God for healing today  
Healing is a sacrament – it's a sign and symbol of God's grace

And finally **six** – and for me this is the most exciting bit  
Healing isn't about restoring the status-quo  
It's not about getting us back to "normal"  
It's not the "same old same old"  
Healing is about restoration and transformation

I bought a printer last year and it went wrong last week  
I took it back to the shop and they gave me a brand new one

That's only because the printer was less than a year old  
God's guarantee is "new for old" – and it's for life

So I want to talk to the healing prayer group  
About restarting prayer ministry after Sunday services

But it would be a complete waste of time  
if no one went to them for prayer

you've heard the old joke  
"I wanted to be a doctor but I didn't have the patience"  
God is waiting in His surgery and He is very patient!

Oh yes, and one last thing  
At the AGM I will be talking about mission  
Put simply,  
Jesus spells out our mission at the end of Matthew's gospel  
To go and make disciples of all nations  
**Healing them,**  
and baptising them in the name of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit

If we are serious about making disciples,  
healing is NOT an option!