

Saved to be healed or healed to be saved? What do Christians mean when they talk about ‘being saved’?

Good morning.

Here is a question Christians tussle with, is humanity saved to be healed, or healed to be saved? Or to put it another way, What do Christians mean when they talk about ‘being saved’?

Even more in recent months, we have come to rely on, and to admire, our National Health Service. We are incredibly grateful, for their skills and their dedication to the care of all who are sick and suffering at such a desperate time. More than that we trust them to do their best and that trust was rewarded. The truth is that unless you do trust you are unable to receive the best.

Today I want you to meet a Doctor and to say, ‘trust him, he’s a doctor’. St Paul trusted him; he also liked his doctor. *Everybody* liked him, so much so, that we do not really know his real name – was it Lucius or perhaps Lusianus; was he Greek or a Roman; probably not; he understood too much of the Jewish way of being. People all called him by his familiar, shortened name – Luke. ‘Only Luke, the beloved physician is with me’, writes Paul from prison. The very fact of Luke’s presence, brought comfort and belonging, wholeness and yes, I dare to say, healing, to the desperate condition in which Paul found himself.

We have no information as to why Luke joined that small group of people who survived, recovered and rejoiced after the horrific, and then wonderful events surrounding the death and resurrection of Jesus; nor do we know why he came to believe and trust in Jesus as Son of God. Like St Paul, he comes much later on in the scene. He never met Jesus; was not one of the twelve Disciples. There is some speculation from his Gospel that he knew Mary the mother of Jesus, one can therefore, surmise, from her he heard and absorbed so much. ‘Mary treasured all these things in her heart’ Luke wrote.

He was clearly intimate with the formation of what you might call the Christian movement (known then as *The Way*), in the 30 or so years after the first Easter; that is when he wrote down the Gospel that bears his name. He had St Mark’s Gospel in front of him and, as was usual, simply incorporated much of it in his own work. Just as important as his Gospel, Luke wrote, with as much accuracy as he knew how, *The Acts of the Apostles*. It’s a diary and travel book; a first draft of Christian history if you like. He gives an account of some of the personalities and politics of those heady, early days, in the life of the early Christian Church; it is he who tells us that it was in Antioch that they were first called Christians (a Greek word meaning “follower of Christ”). Today, I along with all Christians, are Luke’s inheritors in the different and presently difficult days of our lives.

There is no question that Christ commissioned his followers - collectively known as The Church - to heal the sick; by word and deed he gave strength to that ministry. His acts of healing were *signs* of the kingdom of heaven in the here-and-now. Still, it is quite unfair and unrealistic to compare treatment of the sick in gospel times with medicine today. Luke, because he was a physician, skilled in the diagnosis and treatment of disease at that time, focuses more than the other writers on the healing that Jesus brought; he relates at least 18 instances of healing.

Luke, a keen observer of the human condition, saw clearly what we also see at the time of our present dis-ease. He saw that physical disease can give rise to, as well as come from, the dis-ease of the spirit (of the mind) as well as the body. A Christian will say the healing of memories, of fractured relationships, of society's ills are all within the providence of God. The Christian will recognise that the greatest healing, is to be taken into the arms of God. For a dying member of a family, or a friend, the appropriate way of prayer may be, not that a disease or a condition may suddenly reverse or disappear, but that *'your will be done, Lord, not mine'*. A Christian may think the walk through the door of death as the ultimate healing; a soul taken back into the care of the One who gave life and being. There is a confronting of the past and resolution for the future.

There is no doubting that Christ charged his Church to heal the sick. Think of the healing by Peter and John of the cripple at the temple gate (told in the Book of Acts, chapter 3 for those who want to read it). Dr Luke writes the account; I do not think he recorded it as a miraculous cure; rather it is a statement then, as now, that Jesus the healer is at work. In Jesus' name Peter spoke; the full force of what that meant in his day is not part of our culture now.

Look again! William Temple in his Readings in St John's Gospel, has no doubt that in scale, healing done after Christ's earthly ministry, is far greater than that done in his earthly life. It must be so. Healing will not be confined either to the spiritual or to the physical – the subtle harmony is in both. Women and men are utterly complex amalgams of body and mind and spirit. Healing, must be freshly understood as it comes to new prominence in the present pandemic crisis. There is an obligation in women and men of faith to help the healing of others; they see a world and a society in danger of walking without hope into a spiritual wasteland; they see clearly people at dis-ease with themselves.

Healing and salvation go hand-in-hand and the word *wholeness* and *salvation* are practically interchangeable in scripture. You may remember some Sundays ago I introduced you to Zacchaeus. In the first translations of Holy Scripture into English, William Tyndale, writes that Jesus says to Zacchaeus – 'this day health has come into your house'. Later that became – Salvation. Was Zacchaeus healed and of what? 'Today and every day' says Jesus to Zacchaeus and to you, 'today is a new opportunity to surrender to my love; 'Today' says the psalmist, 'if you will hear his voice, harden not your hearts'. Today, yes, today, may be your day too?

Dr Luke, keen observer of the human condition, recognised God as the source of all that makes life precious. Your desire to live is a silent acknowledgement of the blessings you receive; your disillusion is witness to destiny beyond your understanding. Perhaps that is why Christians try to see the presence of God within our present troubles, walking with us; they pray that good will come out of evil, and sorrow will be turned into joy.

Thank you for listening

Prayer

Let us pray

Blessed are you, Lord,
who do not shun me
but embrace me as I struggle to find the gift within the pain.
Blessed are you, Lord,
who do not shrink from sharing
that you too have known the searing cloud.
Blessed are you, Lord, who listen
and by listening affirm me as I am.
Blessed are you, Lord,
to tell me I am precious
and worthy of the deepest cherishing.
Blessed are you, Lord,
who fan the tiny flame
that shines more brightly in the dark.
Blessed are you, Lord,
who know me as I am.
Amen.