

## ***Does God heal today? – Faith and fear***

(No answers, just more questions)

As you must realise, any discussion on miraculous healing is not, at the current moment, just an interesting academic theological question!

I sat at Sue's bedside 3 or 4 hours after she had come out of theatre and, as she drifted in and out of sleep, she looked pretty terrible. Apart from all the tubes going in (and out!), her face had no colour and looked like a wrinkled prune – sorry, Sue, but it did! To be fair, you might expect her to look like that after having lost one and a half stone in weight and having had a 12" incision in her stomach.

Have you ever heard of 'drainpiping' – of the spiritual variety, I mean? I'd forgotten about it until then. Our great friend Captain Tony used to get the kids to do it at holiday club, and they did it at Spring Harvest too, I think. They explained that the healing power comes from God, so we reach out one hand to the person needing healing (or whatever other need) and hold the other up towards heaven – we are just the channels for God's power, flowing through us. And God did use the kids' simple faith to bring about real change in people's lives!

It felt right, so I drainpiped Sue for some time, while she slept.

Wind back to 1985 and one of the wave of healing meetings where miraculous things seemed to be happening despite my very conservative, anti-charismatic feelings. They invited people to go and be prayed for. "Do I have to go forward?" asked Sue, because she wanted to get rid of the asthma she'd had for 10 years, since our Kenya days. "No, I can pray for you," I said. Somehow, for some reason, I prayed, "Thank you Lord for taking Sue's asthma away!" How and why did I pray that? No idea, but when we went outside afterwards, into the cold night air, she said, "I can breathe!" The asthma had gone and hasn't come back since. How? Why? Dunno! I guess I was given, for that occasion, the gift of faith – and the Bible says, clearly, that faith is a gift from God.

Then almost two years ago, shortly after we had joined St Ed's, they had a healing service. I knew my relationship with Sue needed fixing, so I grabbed Sue's hand – she didn't object – and we were first at the communion rail. Someone came to pray for me, individually; "No, both of us together, please," I said. After we sat down we realised that everyone in the whole church was going up for prayer! Did that prayer for healing work, even though the person didn't really know us from Adam (and Eve)? Dunno, but I know that our relationship is the best it's been for a very long time, probably ever in our 45 years.

Did the drain-piping work? Well, 15 hours later, Sue looked totally different, sitting up and smiling (though laughing wasn't a good idea!). Was it prayer? Was it the drugs? Was it the excellent care she received? I don't know, but does it matter? Then again, maybe it was you guys praying? I don't know, and I don't care; I'm just very grateful to God, and to you. It's been a humbling experience.

What of the future? I said we'd been given the all-clear as regards cancer, but Sue reminded me that that's not strictly true. The rapid test of the cyst, done during the operation, was negative, so they didn't remove lymph glands etc., but they're running a more critical test that takes two weeks, and we'll see the consultant on 12th February to get the results.

So now the theoretical discussions about prayer and healing become very real and practical again. How do we view the prospect of receiving those results? My mother was petrified of cancer and wouldn't even use the word. I knew that one of my father's sisters had "died" before I was born, but it was never spoken about. I think I have inherited at least some of that fear. I look at the brown spots on my body (another thing I inherited from Mum!) and the patch on the end of my nose, and I wonder about skin cancer. Indeed, as I was showering this morning I noticed a strange red spot, 3mm across, on my calf, unlike anything I've seen before. Should I get it checked, if it persists?

What do **you** think about faith and fear and healing? Recently, I've had some lively debates about this, with a good friend. Is fear a bad thing? Fear of snakes and wild animals kept our ancestors alive. I feared for Sue's wellbeing as her stomach grew, and so I urged her to insist on a doctor actually seeing her. But fear can also paralyse us – and maybe even make us ill, do you think? I'm more than happy to accept that our attitudes and our relationships, especially the negative ones, can have a huge effect on our health.

One more thing in this rambling early-morning missive, and it's part of the faith/fear thing: The good friend above, plus my spiritual director friend, independently said a couple of weeks ago, as we faced the scary unknown, that we should find scriptures that we could read out loud and declare God's promises. Yes, OK, but **which** scriptures?! The only one that jumped out at me was the Sunday morning reading (we use the CofE lectionary): Isaiah 43:1 to wherever. It's the bit about God being with you as you walk through the rivers and through the fire. It sort of seemed good because it was about how God loves us and cares for us, but I was uneasy about the fire and rivers (we didn't at that stage know what the problem was). The fear of cancer was part of it, I'm sure.

OK, it had the bit about bringing your children back from the east, west, north and south – and our two sons are north and south of Taverham (well, NNW and SSE) – but I still had this nagging fear that God was preparing us to face something nasty. But go a bit further into Isaiah 43 and you get that lovely "Forget the former things ... see I am doing a new thing" and what an amazing 'new thing' we've experienced! And I've tried to walk through it with you folks, but how do I know what God **is** saying to me?

I wasn't sure whether to share this final bit, but I think it would be more honest to do so. As you'll have gathered, sleep hasn't been coming easily of late, partly for good reasons – excited about what God has been doing – but partly for bad reasons: fear of what the future might hold.

I tend to notice patterns in numbers and letters – it's one of the hazards of being a proofreader, I think. I'm cycling along, glance at my speedo and see a speed of 12.3 mph or a distance of 22.2 miles – it's a strongly reinforced synapse in my brain, I suppose. But of late, when I wake up early, the time seems to be 4:44 or 3:21. Coincidence? Maybe. That old synapse? Maybe. But one thought I had was to wonder if God was saying, "Don't worry, it's me. I'm here for you. I'm trying to reassure you."

That's nice, but I didn't really **want** to believe this was God's doing. Why? Well, as with Isaiah 43, faith says, "God is with you," but fear says, "Why do I need to know that? Presumably it's because difficult times are coming." I don't want difficult times!

Having got to sleep at about 9.30 last night (I'm pretty tired!), at 12.34(!) I awoke to go to the loo. I struggled a bit (as I often do) to get back to sleep. The next time I woke and looked at the clock it was 2:34. "OK," I thought, if it's you, Lord, how about three in a row?"

After waking at 2:34, I tried to get back to sleep, but these thoughts that you're now reading kept niggling, and I realised that I might as well get up and write. I cautiously sneaked a look over my pillow to see the clock. It was 3:10. I laughed at myself, lay there for a while, and then got up and had a shower. When I came back into the bedroom and looked at the clock, it was 3:33 – a row of three threes!

OK, OK, I know you love me, Lord, and I know I can face the future with you. Yes, at some stage, be it sooner or later, difficult times will come. Please help me to trust (faith) you for all I need, we need, as I face my (real) fears.

Paul Bev. 1.2.19