

Worship 5 July

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Welcome to this time of worship on the 5th of July and which is the official anniversary day of the NHS. Yes, on this day, 72 years ago, this wonderful institution in British society was established. Since then, doctors, nurses, paramedics, health workers and support staff have provided us with the most excellent health care, free and accessible to all, and sometimes delivered in very stressful circumstances, as at this time of the corona pandemic. We are truly grateful for all who work on the frontlines and in supporting roles of the health service, sometimes at great personal risk. Not surprising, many homes and public places display messages of gratitude to the NHS. In recognition of the NHS and its anniversary I pick up the theme of health and healing in our worship today, and this from a faith perspective. We all need healing some time in our lives. However much we try to avoid sickness and pain, at some time or other a simple painkiller will not do the job and we need help to be cured, or, if that is not possible, to manage our sickness and pain. The question I would like to consider is, is only the GP surgery or the hospital a place of health care and healing? Is the community of faith also a place of healing? What is healing and how do we engage in a healing ministry based on Jesus' commission to preach the gospel and heal the sick? What about the larger understanding of healing, wholeness and reconciliation? We will listen to different voices that seek to answer the question but let us first sing our praises to God.

Hymn

Praise to the Lord, the Almighty

Prayer

Gracious and loving God, you have blessed us with the gift of life and placed us in a world of beauty and wonder. Your will for us is fullness of life and wholeness in body, mind and spirit. We thank and praise you... In your presence we remember all that prevents fullness of life for ourselves and for others, all that damages the world which you have created.... God of peace and healing love, bless us with your grace and as we recognize the healing you bring in our lives, may we be filled with gratitude and joy....Amen.

Reading

Matthew 11: 28-30 & 15: 29-31

Reflection 1 What is healing? There is no one definition for it embraces so many aspects of life. It is a ministry often seen as one of the church's responses to Jesus' commission to preach the gospel and heal the sick (Luke 10). It is meeting people at their point of need and helping them on their journey to wholeness. We believe that God loves and cares for people and all creation and that God's desire is that people who are hurting and broken in body, mind, spirit and the emotions, should know healing, love, peace, forgiveness and reconciliation. All churches have a healing ministry which may be through prayers of intercession for those who are sick, prayers of forgiveness and reconciliation, the sacraments, pastoral work, church groups for young and the not so young, specialist help groups and others such as the listening ear. The healing ministry embraces all these aspects and many more. By more consciously bringing Christ into the situation through listening and prayer, and being guided and empowered by the Holy Spirit, we take this a step further and deeper. (URC website)

Chorus: *Lord of life, we come to you* (Tune: Eriskay Love Lilt)

Lord of life, we come to you.

Lord of all, our Saviour be,

come to bless and to heal,

with the light of your love (Catherine Walker)

Reflection 2 The wonderful thing about gospel medicine is that it works right away; it is no sooner said than done, because the good news effects what it proclaims...On the one hand the gospel is just a bunch of words: "Weep no more," "Do not be afraid," "Your sins are forgiven," "Stand up and walk." They are just words, and prescribing them to an ailing world seems as futile as putting a bandage on a broken bone or an aspirin in the hands of someone who is dying. But when we proclaim these words as *gospel*, we say more: we say that they are words that belong to someone, and that every time we speak them someone is present, speaking them through us, so that we never speak them alone, and they never come back empty. They effect what they proclaim: they dry tears, they quench fears, they forgive sins, they heal souls, they make true the good news of God in Christ every time we speak them. Every time we do, we take our places in the ancient relay of faith, passing on the glad tidings we ourselves have heard from our predecessors in the practise of gospel medicine. May the

God who has given us the will to do this thing give us the grace and power to perform it, restoring the world to health one blessed word at a time, if need be, until the whole world can join us in saying, "Amen." (Barbara Brown Taylor in Gospel Medicine)

Chorus: *Lord of life, we come to you*

Reflection 3 We live in a society that defines healing as an activity that takes largely place between patients and their physicians or nurses. Christians understand the practise of healing as something much larger than this. The central image for us is not *cure* but *wholeness*. Drawing on our Jewish heritage, we envision human wholeness chiefly in terms of right relationships with God and our neighbours. We believe that what Jews call *Shalom* – an all embracing peace that spells the end of meaningless suffering – is the ultimate reality....In this vision, healing is an indispensable part of the coming wholeness that God intends for all creation. This means that the practise of healing is a central part of the reconciling activity of God in the world....Healing events are daily signs of the divine mercy that is surging through our world and guiding it toward its final perfection. This is true whether they take place by the sharing of chicken soup, the performance of delicate surgery, or the laying on of hands in a service of worship. (John Koenig, "Healing" in "Practicing our Faith")

Chorus: *Lord of life, we come to you*

Reflection 4 Our God is a healing God. Sometimes God heals through the ways in which we have been created, with wondrous immune systems and with bodies that are able to recover from injury. Sometimes God heals through the skill and expertise of doctors. But scripture also affirms, and experience affirms, that prayer can also be an instrument of healing. Any of these forms of healing can be called miraculous, because the word miracle means, literally, "a sign that points to God."

If we are sceptical about the role of prayer in healing it may be because there is a tendency in our time to talk of human beings as made up of distinct parts: we are physical beings, emotional beings and spiritual beings. The Bible, however, points us back to an understanding that these aspects of our lives are inextricably intertwined. They are all of a piece. God does not just care for our spiritual lives. God cares for us as whole people.

Prayers are not magic words which, if said in the right way, necessarily will bring about the desired result. Rather, prayer is a way to enter into a relationship with God who cares for us body and soul. And if someone else is offering prayers for our healing we are also drawing on the ways in which we are bound in community. For those seeking healing, such prayers can make all the difference. (Martin Copenhaver in UCC Daily Devotional)

Chorus: *Lord of life, we come to you*

Prayer

Loving God, today we pray for the NHS and all who are engaged in bringing healing in hospital and in the community.

We pray for all who are giving support to those who are ill and in pain, family and friends as well as health and care workers

And we pray for all decision makers and managers in the health services, that they may be wise, imaginative and compassionate in administrating and caring for the NHS staff and its patients

We pray for local care homes and community services and give you thanks for all who work in them or volunteer for them.

We thank you for all whom you have blessed with the gifts of compassion, knowledge and healing skills. Be with them in all they do, that they may be your channels of healing to those who suffer in body, mind and spirit and that they may find encouragement from those whom they care for.

Compassionate God, we hold before you all who are in need of healing, comfort and strength, especially those who have asked for our prayers or those whom we know are suffering.....calm the anxious mind, bring balm to the depressed spirit and strengthen the weakened body, that all who suffer in body, mind and spirit may know your healing presence surrounding and upholding them. And this we pray in the name of Jesus who taught us to pray.....OUR FATHER

Hymn

I heard the voice of Jesus say

Blessing

God of peace and healing love, bless us with your grace
Bless us with gratitude and joy for the healing you bring into our lives through doctors, nurses, care workers, family and friends
Bless us and keep us. Amen.