

Lent 2 Feb 22nd 2015 Generous with our actions (8.30am
Hebron HC 9.30am)

John 5:1-18 & James 2:14-17 -Generosity requires us to act, not
just observe

Continuing our Generosity theme- this is the second week of our Lent series.

Last week we heard the story of Jesus changing water into wine and learned that generosity requires us to change, to do things differently, to give of ourselves.

This week we have heard the story of Jesus at the pool of Bethesda, where he heals a man who has lain there for 38 years waiting for the waters to be stirred.

When the waters bubbled up, the first person into the waters was healed. Some said it was an angel, and it was probably a natural, underground stream with spa-like healing qualities, but for this man, who couldn't walk and as he didn't have anyone to help him get in quickly, he was still a cripple after all these years.

This pool was well known for its healing stories. It was in Jerusalem, north of the Temple Mount. If you go today you can see it still as the site has been excavated by archaeologists. Isn't it wonderful to be reminded of the reality of Jesus, a real live person, in a place we can see today?

This wasn't just a Jewish healing site, pagans regarded it as a sacred site too. There are no doubts about the reports of healings-they were true, but obviously not frequent enough.

Like with the water being changed into wine Jesus demonstrates, not only his power, but that he has come to do something different, in a new way, the man didn't need to get into the water-Jesus just healed him there and then.

Some think it strange that Jesus asks him, 'Do you want to get well?'- surely that is a silly question, why else would he be there, but there is a feeling with some people after a lifetime of disappointment that this is just how life is for them, and perhaps they have survived by begging or other people helping them and they don't think they could live another way by being well.

God does know us, from our beginning to our end, and who hasn't a past that somewhere causes us pain, perhaps because of hurts or errors we have made, or others have afflicted on us. Psychologists and counsellors today recognise the power of the past, and around the 'pool' today there are many who are emotionally and relationally paralysed who need to be set free, and enabled to walk again.

Are we able to see our wrong actions have consequences, have had consequences. **What would it take for us to change?** Jesus comes to us at our 'poolside' today.

What are we waiting for? We don't need the waters to be stirred, Jesus stirs our hearts by the Holy Spirit and we know it is time to be healed if we can only make the move.

The first step is often to acknowledge we need healing, and that we can come to Jesus and ask for healing. Sometimes we need simply to stop sinning. Jesus told the man later not to sin any more.

Isn't a communion service just the place to come, where we see the cross and see what damage sin does, **can we ask for forgiveness for very specific things today?** Here also at the communion table we see what power generosity and love and forgiveness have to bring forgiveness, healing and freedom. *(Today I am going to offer to anoint with oil anyone who would like to be anointed. This is one way we in the C of E offering a healing ministry, in a sacramental way, as you come for Communion)*

We need to change our attitudes or our behaviours to receive healing. Withholding forgiveness or bitterness make us twisted and holding grudges can paralyse us restricting our capacity to live and love freely. We can't continue in the same bad habits expecting God to bless us and change us if we won't let these things go, or let God take these things from us.

There are examples where in his grace and generosity he does just heal, but most times there is a follow on challenge to change, follow him, be like him, to act like him.

Jesus is so generous-he doesn't check whether the man is going to change his ways before he heals him. He doesn't put him through a confirmation course to teach him about the Christian faith before he can be healed-Jesus in his compassion and endued with God's power heals him and he sets off on the road to healing.

Generosity can be a disturbing thing. Many people don't like to be beholden to someone. If someone is generous towards them they need to repay them back. We can't out-give God though-he will always win, and he longs to give us his love and healing and freedom.

Generosity can also be disturbing in that we'd rather know just how far we have to go so that we can stop, rather than be involved in a continual cycle of giving. Some people like to give in church when they know what the amount we are aiming to reach is, so that it is finite, we have reached it, rather than having to work out how much we are able to individually give and to keep giving.

In close, loving relationships we are called to give and give and keep giving love, without counting the cost or knowing when or where it will end. This is precisely what generosity is, God-like

generosity, real generosity, a cycle of continual giving, an endless flow of God, from God towards mankind, towards us. This is the Gospel we believe is it not, and it reaches out to strangers, neighbours, our community too, not just friends and loved ones.

Sometimes we will be aware of just how much we have received. At other times we will be aware of the extent to which God is involving us in the giving. This way we are the channels of God's generosity towards others, and the best way is if it is done secretly. We have a part to play.

In the reading from James we hear faith is no good without deeds living it out. There is no point in being 'so heavenly minded we are no earthly use'. Don't say, as it says in the text, go in peace, to a beggar, but put generosity into action and do something practical. This is very much what this Acts40 Lent sermon series and the lent course is all about-practical, real, actual generosity-look at your notice sheet, see 40acts website.

So let's put our faith into action, our belief into action, let's be God-like and generous.