

Hinde Street Methodist Church

Sunday 26th May 2019

10am Rev Peter Cornick

'Do you want to be made well?'

There have been many times in my ministry, when I have thought I knew best, how to heal someone; what was needed to fix the person; make them well:

- the woman who refused a care package, because she was quite able to care for herself thank you
- a homeless man who I helped fill in endless forms to obtain money for the social security, money to which he was entitled, but he wouldn't sign the form
- the woman who needed to get up and walk, in order to exercise and prevent the muscles wasting in her legs

All of these examples could apply to any number of people I have visited over the years. Sometimes, I have come away thinking, the only possible outcome, is illness or accident, at which point, the person will be admitted to hospital. Someone who does not wish to take the money or help available, will continue to be affected by poverty, which may be through choice, events in the past, or through their poor mental health.

Of course, there are times when someone wants to be made well, but those in authority don't have the resources to help. In my previous life as a care assistant for men with mental health issues, I spent many a long night, trying to persuade psychiatrists that the man I cared for needed to be admitted to hospital. On one occasion, my very distressed charge was asked the standard question, 'can you recite the alphabet backwards'; 'I can't' he replied, and pointing at me said, 'but ask him.' I nearly spent the night in the Maudsley.

As you can tell, some of these dear people I have encountered, and I include the psychiatrists, have left me frustrated that what seems to me, the obvious solution, is not at all obvious to them. Perhaps the hardest lesson to learn for any of us who care for someone, is to allow that person to define their own healing. Unless of course, that person becomes a danger to themselves or others.

'Do you want to be made well', invites the man to whom Jesus speaks, to make choices. Jesus does not force his potential to heal on the man, but the very question is the beginning of his freedom.

The response of the man is to make excuses for his condition. He's been at the side of this pool for so long, waiting for healing from its spring like properties, because he can't get to the pool quick enough when the spring bubbles. He has no friends to help him into the water. This man cuts an isolated figure of someone who's given up trying.

Or has his condition come to define his life; would healing mean facing up to responsibility, work, past mistakes? For someone so cut off, even cut off from the community who gather by this pool, might re-integration into society be too painful? So again, Jesus' question, 'do you want to be healed', asks, not just about physical healing, but about the man's whole self. What would it be like to live without this pain?

Perhaps the story tells us that the many people we encounter in the life of the West London Mission, have complicated stories themselves. Our desire for quick fixes, to heal our own fears, is rarely going to meet the needs.

'Do you want to be made well', will be asked of someone who visits Seymour Place; to take up their mat and walk, might mean a referral to the Night Shelter whilst working with them on finding accommodation. The isolated being brought back to community but led by that person themselves.

And I believe that through such work, Jesus continues to be present to the man by the pool, asking 'do you want to be made well.' Because if you do, on what might be a long healing journey, I am there for you.