

## Feeling alright?

- How is everyone feeling this morning?
  - anyone ever had.... **an operation?** **chicken pox?** **broken bone?** **a cold this year?** **stayed overnight in hospital** (apart from when you were born!) **back ache?** **cut or bruise at the moment?** **visited someone who is unwell this year?**
- Everyone, at some point in their life, will be unwell
  - and we all know people who are unwell too!
  - and there are people who have more serious things wrong with them than those we've mentioned this morning...
- But that's **NOT** how God wanted it to be:
  - when he made the world, it was all good, with no sickness or pain
  - and when we are in heaven with him, when he inaugurates the new heaven and new earth, all sickness and pain will be taken away!
  - today we'll be discovering that not only will God eventually transform all our sickness and suffering, but that it's possible sometimes to see something of what that transformation will be like, even now!!

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## A Word Centred Building

- Church buildings tell you a lot about what the people who built them believed!
  - I'm no student of church architecture, but how we have shaped our places of worship over the years is rooted in what we believe
- Take the building in Motherwell where I was associate minister before we moved here:
  - it was large, kept in good order, reasonably attractive - if a bit dark and purple!
  - but that wasn't what it really communicated...
  - it was full of theological symbolism
  - first, it was built in a cruciform shape - **see image**
  - second, the communion table was "**fenced**" - **see image**
  - third, it was a **Word centred** building - **see image**
  - central pulpit - communion table is below pulpit - only place that every seat can see is the pulpit...
  - I was up in gallery on a couple of times during my time in Motherwell, and even at 6'3" I could only just see the head of the person standing behind the table - but I could see the pulpit fine!
  - even the acoustics favoured the pulpit
- The way buildings are built - especially churches - tells us something about those who built them:
  - what they thought was important, what they believed.
- **That was that the preaching of God's word was absolutely critical - the central priority in worship - perhaps even the only thing that really mattered.**
- That priority is something I hope we share:
  - hopefully true in our attitude as we hear that word read and explained
- **BUT, such an emphasis can sometimes lead to the neglect of other things too.**

## Early Church Outreach

### Context:

- Paul just converted;
- Church growing - time of peace before storms ahead (Acts 9:31).
- Beginnings of move into the Gentile world are just about to unfold, as Peter speaks to Cornelius and he is converted;  
(Indeed, Peter went straight from Joppa, where God raised Dorcas, to visit

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Cornelius...)

- Church is on the go, growing, reaching out....

### HOW?

- Take the cover off, lift the lid.
- Find the church not simply concerned with preaching, but with caring for others - and that as a part of their mission.
  - Peter heals Aeneas (who was probably already a Christian) - and many others come to faith as they see both God's power and God's care for the helpless demonstrated.
  - Dorcas making coats for people, caring, being loved for her care... and when she is raised from death, her care has broken open the hearts of many in Joppa, who are ready to hear Peter's words and respond in faith.
- These miracles echo, even in their details, the kind of things Jesus did - healing, caring, proclaiming - all bound up together as he spoke forth the good news of the Kingdom of God.
  
- The care was present.
- The word was present.
- Mission didn't happen with either missing - both necessary.
  
- Reflection of what Jesus said his purpose was in coming:
  - "I have come that you might have life, and life in all its fullness" (John 10:10)
- That's what he is interested in bringing into people's lives - fullness, wholeness:
  - perhaps physical healing;
  - perhaps divine strength to bear immense loads of care;
  - perhaps the emotional balance of knowing that God cares for you, and in that bestows value, while yet chipping away at any pride - true humility and the attractiveness of a godly life!
  
- In the church's recent past we have very often split into two opposing camps:
  - those who preach - and have a dry, cerebral, apparently careless attitude, who haven't dealt with the causes of poverty even when charity has been given;
  - those who care - but neglect to speak God's truth into situations - who think you can apply God's love as a sticking plaster without realising that love often needs to cut out wrong, pride, self-reliance in a person's life too.
- Each side has been suspicious of the other, not able to listen, learn - either from each other, or indeed from God's word.
  - we need both - to care, and to speak
  - and we need to allow God's power to work in the midst, to see him change lives, whether through miraculous healings and transformations, or through the Spirit-given strength to **keep on keeping on** when life is hard
  
- That's what Peter was doing in this passage:

### (1) Following the Example of Jesus

- First, Peter is shown as following the **example of Jesus**:
  
- Healing of **paralytic in Capernaum** (vs.32-35, Mark 2:1-12):
  - clearly a paralytic - 8 years in this case (v.33), carried on a mat in Capernaum (Mark 2:3)
  - command to get up and tidy his mat (v.34, Mark 2:11)
  - immediacy of the resultant healing (v.34, Mark 2:12)
  
- Raising of **Jairus' daughter** (vs.36-41, Luke 8:41-56):
  - the arrival of the healer on the scene after the person has died (v.37,39, Luke 8:51)
  - people weeping noisily in mourning (v.39, Luke 8:52)
  - Peter sent people out of the room (v.40, Luke 8:51)
  - words spoken to the dead person are almost identical: "**Tabitha koum!**" / "**Talitha koum**" (v.40, Luke 8:54)

## Acts 9:32-41 Illustrated Letters 1: The power of love Fintry, 3/6/2007, am

- Peter was following the example of his Lord

### (2) Through the Power of Jesus

- Secondly, both miracles were performed by the **power of Jesus**:
  - (v.34) "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "**Jesus Christ** heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up.
  - (v.40) Peter sent them all out of the room; then he got down on his knees and **prayed**. Turning toward the dead woman, he said, "Tabitha, get up." She opened her eyes, and seeing Peter she sat up.
- Peter knew he could not overcome disease or death by his own authority or power!
  - rather, Peter was dependent on the power of Jesus

### (3) Signs of the Salvation of Jesus

- Thirdly, both these miracles were signs of the **salvation of Jesus**:
  - because of his confidence in the power of Christ, Peter dared to address both Aeneas and Tabitha with the same word of command:
    - **anastethi**, (get up!)
- This is the same word that is used of God raising Jesus to life, of God "getting Jesus up" out of the grave!
  - in other words, it resonates with the promise of new life that comes through faith in Christ;
  - it doesn't pretend that Aeneas and Tabitha both subsequently died in the normal way
- Rather, it **points out** that recovery from paralysis and resuscitation from death were both **visible signs** of that new life into which - by the power of the resurrection - we sinners are raised

### (4) To the Glory of Jesus

- Finally, these two miracles result in the **glorification of Jesus**:
  - in both cases what had happened became widely known, and many people became followers of Jesus
  - many people came to acknowledge his Lordship and praise his name
  - to his name glory was brought!
- These signs, these miracles, were given by God to **authenticate** and to **illustrate** the salvation message that Peter brought:
  - **authenticate**: is this real? Yes, see, it brings healing and new life!
  - **illustrate**: what is this salvation? It is one that brings healing and new life!

## Contemporary Outreach?

- Couple of examples - not definitive - example of the way God can work.

### Ministers at crisis times

- Training for ministry - meet lots of ministers...!
- I'm not going to give specific examples, but one "story" I've heard repeated over and over is of ministers finding that care by a Christian has often opened the way for a word in season:
  - visiting for a funeral, and a Christian neighbour has helped during the preceding illness... the family are ready to hear of God's love.
  - sometimes even the very fact that, however it happens, someone from the church visited at time of need - minister, elder, pastoral care team - a little thing, and yet opens the way... perhaps even just for that person to come along to church, to start to hear the gospel.  
(Davidson's Mains - funeral, care, came along to church where lunches were served, close to where his part time job was, fellowship and support through grief - started to come regularly to worship, listening for why these people cared for him.)

### **Boy learns to read**

- SU camp - under-privileged kids - sometimes Social Work referrals, difficult backgrounds, lots of hurt.
- Leader - boys, no apparent interest, though seemed to have a good enough time.
- Wrote to the boys afterwards.
- Sent a card on their birthdays.
- Christmas sent a card.
- Never received any reply - not uncommon - but persevered.
- Nearly a year after camp that leader received a letter from the boy.
  - the reason he hadn't replied earlier?
  - he couldn't read or write.
- But someone had demonstrated that they cared. Had written to HIM - not his mum or dad or whoever was at home. To him.
- And that care had been enough to encourage him to learn to read - to begin to live a life with a little more fullness, a little more of what God intended for that child.
- Care and words went hand in hand at that camp - the child responded, maybe not with a profession of faith, but with an appreciation that someone loved him - someone loved him because of Jesus - and that was something he'd never experienced before.

### **Conclusion**

- Mission isn't just about words - from a pulpit or anywhere else.
- Its not just about belief, about head knowledge.
- Its about demonstrating God's concern for the whole person - his desire that we should have "life, and life in all its fullness" (John 10:10)
  
- Its also about taking the opportunities that such care so often throws up to speak of Christ's love, to call for people to respond to His call.
  
- So, lets not limit mission (or any other part of our Christian life!) to words only.
- Lets be balanced:
  - deeds and words;
  - words and deeds.
  - and words and deeds bathed in the **power of the Spirit**, depending on him in prayer, open to his transforming situations incredibly
- Let us have the **patience and strength to care and to care and to care**, and to go on caring.
- Let us have the **courage to speak** when the occasion presents.
- Let us have the **wisdom to know both what to say and how to care**.
- Let us have the **discernment to know when to pray for God to intervene in miraculous ways**
- **Let us reflect the Lord we love, by showing his love in all its fullness, in all its richness, in all its variety, to the world around us**