+WEEKLY REFLECTION

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Healing at the Heart of the Church

The recent Festival of Healing in our Diocese - ‘A Healing Church for a Hurting World’ - was, by any measure, a gift.

Across parishes and communities people gathered with openness, hope and expectation. Stories were shared, prayers were offered, and many spoke afterwards about experiencing God's presence in deep and personal ways.

Some found physical relief, others discovered emotional healing, while many encountered a renewed sense of peace, encouragement and belonging.

As our Keynote Speaker, Dr Alison Fleetwood (Christian GP and Healing Adviser in the Diocese of Carlisle) reflected: "My prayer is that people will know how deeply cherished by God they are, and will share God's love, healing and restoration in their churches and communities."

Her words capture what many experienced during the festival and point us towards an important question: how do we ensure that healing becomes part of the everyday life of our churches?

When we read the Gospels, we find Jesus continually bringing healing and wholeness. He heals the blind, restores those living with illness, comforts the distressed and welcomes those pushed to the margins.

When John the Baptist's disciples ask whether Jesus is truly the Messiah, Jesus points to the evidence: “The blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear” (Luke 7:22). Healing is not a side issue but one of the signs of God's Kingdom breaking into the world.

The Church therefore cannot treat healing as a specialist ministry reserved for occasional events. Festivals of Healing create space for prayer, expectation and encounter but their deeper purpose is to encourage us to rediscover healing as a normal expression of Christian life.

St James writes, “Are any among you sick? They should call for the elders of the church and have them pray over them” (James 5:14). Prayer for healing was embedded in the ordinary ministry of the early Church.

Normalising healing does not mean making dramatic claims or promising outcomes that cannot be guaranteed. Rather, it means creating communities where people can speak honestly about pain and struggle, and where others respond with compassion, prayer and hope.

Healing is broader than cure. God may work through medicine, counselling, friendship, reconciliation or the gradual restoration of confidence and purpose. Sometimes illness remains while a person discovers a profound sense of God's peace.

The prophet Isaiah gives us a vision of this wider ministry. In Isaiah 61, God's people are called to bring good news to the poor, bind up the broken-hearted and proclaim freedom to those in need. That remains the Church's calling today. In Lancashire, where too many communities continue to experience the impact of deprivation and health inequality, this ministry is particularly urgent.

As the hands and feet of Jesus, we are called not only to pray but also to work for the wellbeing of our neighbours, speak truth when people are neglected, and be a prophetic presence in our communities.

Perhaps the greatest fruit of the Festival of Healing will be a growing confidence that healing belongs in every congregation, school and chaplaincy. In a wounded world, the healing love of Christ is one of the greatest gifts we have to offer. May our churches become places where that love is experienced, shared and made visible every day.

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