

besides. It contains total fellowship with God; peace of mind; forgiveness of sins, healing of mind and body, everything, Shalom is about us as whole human beings. Jesus was never concerned just with making someone walk or see, he was also concerned about their relationship to God; he wasn't concerned just with forgiveness he was also interested in their relationship with the community. All these things go together to make complete human beings and Jesus sought healing and wholeness for whole people. His care for them was holistic.

That, then, is the beginning of the story. The next step is that Jesus gave his disciples the task of continuing that ministry and bringing healing and wholeness to all in his name. We heard him sending them out on a brief healing mission in our Gospel reading but his charge to his Church after his return to his heavenly Father was to continue his work everywhere. He gave his Church authority to preach and to teach and to forgive sins and to heal diseases and to bring good news to all. That then is what we seek to do; that lies at the root of all that we do. The Church is the Body of Christ and so naturally what Christ did, the Church also does and that includes promoting healing and wholeness.

That then is the key to what we do here this evening. For two millennia the Church has obeyed the call of Christ and ministered to people who were sick whatever their sickness might be, but the important thing is that it is the Church's ministry carried out in the name of Christ and in the power of his Holy Spirit. This ministry doesn't belong to any individual. Those of us who will be doing the laying on of hands this evening and the anointing with oil and the praying are nothing in our own right, we are not in any sense 'healers'; God is the healer and we are carrying out the ministry of the Church, we are continuing the work of Christ in the power of his Spirit. The laying on of hands has no magical properties and nor does the oil; they are sacramental signs of what God is doing. What we are here to do this evening is to put ourselves firmly in God's way and to try to open ourselves to him.

...and so to the practicalities. Traditionally the Church' ministry of healing contains two parts. One is the laying on of hands with prayer. Laying on of hands is an ancient sign signifying the passing on of something, as in Ordination or Confirmation, but touch is also a very simple human action which speaks of encouragement and care. Oil speaks of soothing ointment which brings relief; remember the Good Samaritan pouring oil and wine on the wounds of the man who was mugged. Nowadays oil is also used in such things as aromatherapy to bring relaxation. Anointing with oil is carried out by making the sign of the cross on the forehead and on the palms of the hands. Together, these two signs, laying on of hands and anointing with oil make up one of the sacraments of the Church. They are an outward and visible sign of the inward and spiritual healing that God is performing and St. James, in his letter in the New Testament commends them to us.

So, what can you expect to see happening this evening? Well, the simple answer is 'I don't know.' That's up to God. It's very easy to come to God in prayer for healing and to tell him exactly what you require; to put in your order as it were, but in the end what we are here to do is not to tell God what to do but to align our wills with his and open ourselves to his love and mercy. I've shared in healing services such as this in all the Parishes I've worked in and I have to tell you that I've never seen anyone walk who couldn't before and I've never seen a blind man see but that doesn't mean God doesn't do miracles or that he won't. We should expect great things. What I am certain of is that I have seen people helped. I have seen people strengthened; I have seen pain eased. I have seen bereaved people strengthened; I