



Luke 4:40–44

40 At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of illness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, ‘You are the Son of God!’ But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.

42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place. The people were

looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. 43 But he said, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.' 44 And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

Reflection

There simply can be no doubt that Jesus miraculously healed countless people. If we believe anything from ancient history then we need to believe this. There simply can be no doubt. Quite apart from the fact that there is possibly no person in ancient history more historically attested than Jesus Christ, Luke the historian, as well as

other ancient writers recorded many, many occasions on which Jesus healed people, often from sunup to sundown. Jesus was mobbed by crowds seeking healing. Jesus was followed around the Ancient Near East by crowds seeking healing. Not for his teaching, as extraordinary as it was; but for his healing. As we discussed yesterday, those crowds were much younger than you think. Their average age would have been 20–25 years. Sure, there would have been lots of people in their thirties and forties and fifties. Some even in their sixties and the occasional septuagenarian, but the vast majority of people were much younger than you picture in your mind's eye because life expectancy in the first century was so short. Death, disease, famine, war and terribly high rates of infant mortality (one in two died before reach-

ing ten years of age)) and death in childbirth (mothers) made death an ever-present reality in the ancient world. And so, the great crowds following Jesus weren't particularly interested in his moral and ethical teaching. How many twenty-five-year olds do you know who go and listen to ethics lectures for entertainment? Very few I imagine. However, when life is so uncertain, when death and disability are daily realities, and when one comes along who holds out the hope of healing the blind, the lame and the crippled; when one comes who may just be able to save your last precious daughter, desperately sick in bed, who you thought had made it because she'd reached ten years of age – when you hear the good news of someone like this, someone who has the power to reverse sin's curse on the world, to

alleviate suffering and even perhaps defeat death, well that's why the Gospels attest to the huge crowds that came out to Jesus. They came to be healed. And they were – Jesus' healings and exorcisms and miracles reinforcing the authority of his teaching and his claims about himself. But make no mistake the people came to be healed.

And yet two thousand years onwards, despite the indisputable historical record, we don't believe it. In part due to what C S Lewis referred to as chronological snobbery. Chronological snobbery is an argument that the thinking, art, or science of an earlier time is inherently inferior to that of the present, simply by virtue of its temporal priority. 'They didn't have the internet so they must have been far less in-

telligent than us' – despite the fact that many of the towering geniuses of history lived hundreds if not thousands of years ago. And if anything, the ancients knew far more about the knitty-gritty of death than we do. Death was commonplace, soldiering and warfare and ever-present reality. Death had visited almost every multi-generational household through infant mortality, sickness and short life expectancy. With no social welfare system beggars and the disabled could only survive through the charity of others and were everywhere. The ancients knew about death. And so when one came who could defeat it he caused a storm. And the good news of the storm that Jesus caused, and its deeper implications, has survived 2,000 years of scepticism quite simply because of the sheer volume of healings that Jesus performed.

That many eyewitnesses accounts must speak historical truth. Even Jesus' enemies, his opponents, people from the Roman world with no interest in Christianity (except their animosity towards it) openly acknowledge Jesus as a miracle worker. All of this brings us to today's passage from Luke 4:40–44. After healing Peter's mother-in-law, that very night,

40 At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of illness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah. 42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary

place. The people were looking for him and when they came to where he was, they tried to keep him from leaving them. 43 But he said, 'I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.' 44 And he kept on preaching in the synagogues of Judea.

For Jewish people in Jesus' day the Sabbath extended from sunset on Friday to sunset on Saturday. During this time Jews were forbidden to work or travel. Which is why, only at sunset, did the people mob Jesus. News had spread of what happened in the synagogue that morning and the memory of the miracles Jesus performed on his last visit to Capernaum were still very fresh, and so in today's passage,

40 At sunset, the people brought to Jesus all who had various kinds of illness, and laying his hands on each one, he healed them. 41 Moreover, demons came out of many people, shouting, 'You are the Son of God!' But he rebuked them and would not allow them to speak, because they knew he was the Messiah.

This may have even lasted the whole night. Certainly, Jesus and the apostles after him, were not shy of hard work. But whether Jesus' healings and exorcisms lasted the whole night or no, verse 42,

42 At daybreak, Jesus went out to a solitary place.

Very likely to pray. To thank his Father the good works he had been able to perform in his name. To ask his Father for the grace and strength to continue in the hard work of ministry. To implore the Father to bless his words with the Spirit's power so that more than just bodies would be healed. The crowds searched high and low and finally found him. No doubt they wanted him to stay for good; quite the contrast to Jesus' hometown who tried to kill him, but then, he performed no miracles there. Jesus leaves them with these words, and in his words we have Jesus' mission on earth, verse 43,

‘I must proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God to the other towns also, because that is why I was sent.’

I came to seek and save the lost. I came to proclaim the good news of the kingdom of God which is coming and is now here. A kingdom in which there will be no more death, or mourning or crying or pain. I came to heal not just broken bodies but broke lives. I came to restore sight to the spiritually blind, hearing to those who've never heard the word of God and felt his Spirit alive in their hearts. I came not just to cast out demons but to cast Satan into hell forever; I came not just to bring people back from the cusp of death like Peter's mum, I came to lead people through death to eternal life. This is why I came. This is why I was sent by my Father. To preach the good news of the kingdom of God and to lay down my life for the sins of the world, defeating death once and for

all so that you can too.

Think & Pray

A few years ago I spent some time with a group from church volunteering in a cerebral palsy home – men and women of all ages utterly dependant, with little to no control over the movement of their bodies, many could not even speak. We used to simply play jigsaw puzzles and chat to each other. Can I tell you the joy that filled their eyes, often one of their only means of expression, just to join in our game and have relationship with us. Jesus came to bring an end to cerebral palsy, a part of sin's bitter curse on our world. He's making all things new. And it is my prayer than over time, through the ongoing ministry of Christians like my friends from Seaforth

Anglican, those prisoners of cerebral palsy would be set eternally free. Jesus has in store for them new and perfect bodies waiting for them in the new heavens and the new earth. Think and pray for people like these this morning as you consider the enormity of what Jesus came to do and fully and finally achieved at the cross and at the empty tomb.