

During the week I turned up a book I had read many years ago, ‘Fear no Evil’ by the late Rev David Watson. I was prompted to return to this book by the second half of our Second Lesson this morning, from the 2<sup>nd</sup> Letter to the Corinthians, in which Paul, having spoken of the heights of his spiritual experiences, talks in very human terms of his ‘thorn in the flesh’:

Therefore, to keep me from being too elated, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me, to keep me from being too elated. <sup>8</sup>Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, <sup>9</sup>but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ *2 Cor 12:7-9*

This book by David Watson is his reflection on his journey with cancer from the date of his diagnosis to his death some 11 months later. Until that diagnosis David Watson, from the beginnings of his ministry in York, had been in great demand as a preacher throughout the British Isles and further afield.

In the course of the book he takes us through the highs and lows of that period, the diagnosis, the operation and recovery. The diagnosis came just four days before he was due to depart on a month long lecturing and preaching tour of the USA and he had to pull out. He spoke of the strange experience for him of finding himself as the one being ministered to and prayed for instead of being the one who was doing the ministry, doing the praying. He, churches in Britain and America prayed that this thorn, this cancer would be removed – so that he could get on with the work that he was doing for God.

And Paul says: ‘<sup>8</sup>Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me, <sup>9</sup>but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’’

We find ourselves struggling with the problems of unanswered prayer, of mortality. I find myself, as I so often do, going back to the service of Baptism, that sacrament that marks the beginning of my spiritual life. There is a lovely Pastoral Introduction to the service of Baptism in the Prayer book that begins:

Baptism marks the beginning of a journey with God which continues for the rest of our lives, the first step in response to God's love.

The beginning of a journey with God, a journey into God, back to God that continues for the rest of our life. As the child is signed with the sign of the cross:

Christ claims you for his own.  
Receive the sign of the cross.

Live as a disciple of Christ,  
fight the good fight,  
finish the race, keep the faith.

**Confess Christ crucified,  
proclaim his resurrection,  
look for his coming in glory.**

May almighty God deliver you from the powers of darkness, restore in you the image of his glory, and lead you in the light and obedience of Christ. **Amen.**

An injunction to faithfulness; Live as a disciple of Christ, fight the good fight, keep the faith

a prayer for healing, ‘May almighty God .... restore in you the image of his glory.’

We live in a broken and hurting world. Our lifelong journey to God and into God is a journey of healing, of restoration. As I mentioned a few Sundays

back, healing and salvation are closely linked in the New Testament, being translations of a single Greek word in the original text. In this lifelong journey we are talking about we travel all sorts of terrain. There are times when the road is easy, times when the path is rough and hard to follow; times of great joy, times of anxiety and disappointment – times when our hopes and most earnest prayers seem to meet a brick wall. Then I remember Jesus in Gethsemene, as he contemplates the suffering that lies ahead, ‘Father, let this cup pass from me. Yet not my will but yours be done.’

I realise he is with me, travelling the road with me, listening to me, sharing my joys and my sorrows, speaking into my hopes and fear. I realise he is with me in other people, in loved ones, in friends and colleagues, in the stranger who listens and understands.

I am with you always, to the very end of time. There is fundamental healing, when I fully embrace that promise.

Returning to our reading from this 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to the Corinthians, I sense Paul looking back to a similar fundamental healing in his own life, as he recalls:

<sup>8</sup>Three times I appealed to the Lord about this, that it would leave me,  
<sup>9</sup>but he said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.’ *2 Cor 12:8,9*

It all comes down to that lovely word grace, God acting in Jesus Christ to forgive, inspire, and strengthen me by his Holy Spirit - as I let go of past regrets, as I respond to his guiding hand and go forward trusting not in my strength, my talents, my abilities but in the strength that God supplies.

I go back to David Watson's book, that journal of his final illness. At the end of his lifelong journey with God and into God, we find a man at peace with God, at peace with others, at peace with himself. There is a lovely review of this book on the Amazon website which includes the following:

Something transformational occurred in Watson's life. This is what God does: he transforms. Sometimes that transformation may include physical healing and sometimes it might include bringing someone home.

This something that is transformational is healing, this is grace, this is:

The peace of God, which passeth all understanding, that keep our hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God, and of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord:

2 Christ on my right hand,  
Christ on my left hand,  
Christ all around me,  
shield in the strife.  
Christ in my sleeping,  
Christ in my sitting,  
Christ in my rising,  
never to part. *Hymn 611*