

As you know, one of the aspects of my connection with the Burrow School that I really enjoy is that of going in to see classes that are preparing for the monthly Assembly. Last Thursday was this year's Junior Infant Assembly and they took as the basis of their Assembly the story of Zacchaeus, the story of a tax collector turned good. We know the story well, how Jesus told Zacchaeus that he was going to come to his house, how Zacchaeus announced he was going to reimburse and more those he had cheated. In all our translations we read of Jesus declaring, 'Today salvation has come to this house.' As it turns out the very first English translation of the bible, by William Tyndale, put it slightly differently. Instead of 'today salvation has come to this house' his translation read 'today healing has come to this house'. Both are correct in that the Greek words that we translate as salvation and saved carry connotations of healing.

So this morning in our thoughts I want to invite you to hold these two concepts of salvation and healing together in your mind.

This morning our 11 o'clock service follows the order of the Service of Baptism as we welcome young Jacob Warburton into the fellowship of the Church in Baptism. After the parents and god parents have made the promises of Baptism, promises that we pray young Jacob will want to make for himself in confirmation, I will make the sign of the cross on his forehead and, in the course of the prayers that follow I will say 'May God restore in you the image of his glory.' That speaks to me of mending, or restoring something that is broken, that is impaired. That is really what the Fall is all about, a fractured relationship between God and man. And so we pray for Jacob, 'May God

restore in you the image of his glory.’ We pray for mending, for restoration , for healing.

Now turning to the lessons we have read this morning. There is that description of the call of the prophet that we read in that lovely passage from Isaiah. As Isaiah experiences the awesome presence of God in the Temple in the smoke, the shaking of the thresholds, he is aware of his own inadequacy and in the touch of the coals on his lips he experiences cleansing, forgiveness, healing as he offers himself to God.

As Jesus speaks with Nicodemus of regeneration, of being open to the Spirit, he speaks of Moses in the desert:

. ¹⁴And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, ¹⁵that whoever believes in him may have eternal life. *John 3:14ff*

That reference to Moses takes us back to a time during the wandering in the desert when the Israelites were afflicted by poisonous snakes. In the narrative Moses is commanded to make a brass serpent and put it on a pole so that whoever looks at it is healed. In other words the serpent is an instrument of healing. So the lifting up of the Son of Man has a healing significance.

So let us just keep these concepts together in our minds – healing, saving – saving healing.

One of the early Bishops of the Church, Ignatius, Bishop of Lyon, in writing about the Church, the unity of the Church, the fellowship of the Church spoke of the bread and wine of communion as the ‘medicine of immortality’. I would

just want to adapt that slightly and look at the fundamentals of the Gospel that lie behind our sharing of the communion, our remembrance of the life, the death and the resurrection of Jesus – that is our medicine of immortality, the source of our ultimate healing. It is the nature of medicine, the nature of healing, that this is an ongoing process. And so the New Testament will talk of salvation, of healing in past, present and future of having been saved, of being saved in the present, being saved in the future.

In the context of healing, Luke gives accounts of the healing of Jairus' daughter. While on his way to the house, word comes that the girl had died:

⁴⁹ While he was still speaking, someone came from the leader's house to say, "Your daughter is dead; do not trouble the teacher any longer."

⁵⁰ When Jesus heard this, he replied, "Do not fear. Only believe, and she will be saved." *Luke 8:49ff*

Other translations render this 'Only believe and she will be healed.'

Later on we hear of the healing of the blind beggar who, on hearing that Jesus is near, insists on being brought to him.

⁴¹ "What do you want me to do for you?" He said, "Lord, let me see again." ⁴² Jesus said to him, "Receive your sight; your faith has saved you." ⁴³ Immediately he regained his sight. *Luke 18:42*

again, other translations render this 'your faith has healed you'

As the Gospel writers speak of sight restored, of life restored, they speak not just of symptoms dealt with but of a total inner healing. I often look back to the time my mother died just before I was ordained. Of course we had prayed for healing, of course we had been disappointed, hurt, confused when our ardent prayers seemed to find no answer. But I soon came to realise a

profound truth, my mother died healed, at peace with herself, at peace with God.

Going back to that prayer we will be saying for Jacob: ‘May God restore in you the image of his glory.’ We pray that Jacob may come to know that deep inner peace with himself and with God. How will that come to pass? As the beginning of an answer to that question, I leave you with words of Paul in his second letter to the Church at Corinth:

¹⁵ For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved *2 Cor 2:15*

Where will this young child pick up this aroma of Christ? He will pick it up most of all from his parents Roger and Adrienne, from godparents, wider family circle – but also here in this community where he will come to join us in worship and in fellowship.

May we be faithful to our calling to be that aroma of Christ, that in and through the witness of our lives others may come to lay hold of that medicine of immortality that is Christ.