



Strength made perfect
Disability and the church

Session 3: Disability and the Kingdom of God

Participants handout

Welcome and reflections on last week

This week we will look at the Gospels and the book of Revelation to see how disability fits into the Kingdom that Jesus came to proclaim.

Jesus and healing

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

A woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. At once Jesus realised that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Mark 5:25-34

Questions

1. Have you ever experienced prayer for healing in church or somewhere else? If so, how did it make you feel? If you are disabled, how would you feel about someone offering to pray for you?

2. What do you think about the idea of the difference between healing and cure? Have you ever felt a sense of healing in the middle of the experience of sickness or disability? If you are disabled, are you able to find a sense of peace and wholeness in your disability?
3. How do you feel when you read the miracle stories from the Gospels? Some think that the lack of miracles today is a sign of our lack of faith. Do you think this could be true? If you are disabled, do the miracles cause you to question where God is in your experience?

The disabled Christ- the wounds of resurrection

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" After he said this, he showed them his hands and side. The disciples were overjoyed when they saw the Lord. Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you." And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven." Now Thomas (called Didymus), one of the Twelve, was not with the disciples when Jesus came. So the other disciples told him, "We have seen the Lord!" But he said to them, "Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, I will not believe it."

A week later his disciples were in the house again, and Thomas was with them. Though the doors were locked, Jesus came and stood among them and said, "Peace be with you!" Then he said to Thomas, "Put your finger here; see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it into my side. Stop doubting and believe." Thomas said to him, "My Lord and my God!" Then Jesus told him, "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

John 20:19-29

Questions:

1. Have you ever thought about the significance of the risen Jesus still bearing the wounds of crucifixion? How significant do you think this is? Would it be different if Jesus' resurrection body had been perfect and flawless with all marks and wounds removed?
2. How do you feel about calling God 'disabled?' Does it change your understanding of what or who God is? Does it make you feel uncomfortable when what is often viewed as a negative human experience is attributed to God? If you are disabled, how does it make you feel to realise that God shares your experience of disability?

3. Do you think that this should change the position of disabled people in the church? What do you think this might mean? If you are disabled, do you think your body could bear witness to the wounds of the risen Jesus in a special way?

A new creation

Listen to the recording of this section or read the text in the leader's guide

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away." He who was seated on the throne said, "I am making everything new!" Then he said, "Write this down, for these words are trustworthy and true." He said to me: "It is done. I am the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the End. To him who is thirsty I will give to drink without cost from the spring of the water of life. They who overcome will inherit all this, and I will be their God and they will be my child.

Revelation 21:1-7

Time to reflect

Spend some time in silence and ask God to highlight some of the new and challenging things you have heard in this session.

The final image is of the new creation. An experience in which there is no more death or mourning or crying or pain. An experience in which everything is made new. And yet an experience in which the full variety and diversity of our human experience is still present. Present, yet redeemed to be essential to the fullness and glory of the new creation.

Our tears are wiped away, but the full contingency of who we are is not, and that includes our disabilities. Our disabilities though are joined to the wounds of Jesus and, just like his wounds are glorified, so we will share in that glory. The blind, the Deaf, the lame, the disfigured, the cognitively and intellectually disabled, the full range of neuro diversity, all aspects of mental illness and more. The human wounds

and scars that we all bear, in some way become part of the new creation and we will be set free to be children of God in all of our variety and diversity.

How can disability in the church today be a prophetic sign of this truth?

How does the church fail disabled people and stifle their prophetic contribution to our mission and witness?

Can you imagine a church in which disabled people are fully liberated and set free to participate and belong equally with all others?

Hold these questions in silence for a few moments and then share any thoughts that have come to mind.

Prayer