

# Newsletter

March 2010

## Wholeness and healing



### From the Director and Canon Theologian

It only takes a brief glance at a newspaper to remind us that sickness, disease and fragmentation are all around us: what can our faith offer in the face of all this? What do our scriptures say to those who are confronted with their own or others' illness or who must live in situations of profound dis-ease? How can we hear God speaking when there are so many other voices clamouring for our attention?

Here are several perspectives on the 'God dimension' involved in wholeness and healing. So much in our modern life seems eager to fragment our society, our relationships and our very souls. Derek Lightbourne reminds us of the importance of remaining connected: connected to God, of course, but also connected to others, to ourselves and to the world around us. Derek's article teases out the link between the need for healing and our greater search for wholeness, for a holistic approach which sees the connections between all things. So too does my own reflection on the need for healing that we often encounter within our congregations: the way in which any

group of people is actually a 'system' (St Paul called it a 'body') which can experience varying degrees of health or sickness depending on what is going on between and within the different members of the group.

The world we live in is not perfect, as 'Mystery or Miracle' reminds us. Natural disasters and those created by human carelessness have always led to human suffering, and humans struggle to cope with the bewilderment that suffering engenders. That article on the search for healing in a suffering world references the earthquake in Haiti: since then we have seen another, even larger, quake in Chile; meanwhile the Gospel for the 3rd Sunday in Lent confronts us with the 18 people killed by the fall of the tower of Siloam.

It is part of being human to ask the agonised questions about all this, and part of being people of faith to ask those questions of God. That is something worth remembering: true faith is not afraid to question, because the very questions we ask can speak to us of the relationship we have with God and our understandings of God's character.

Something of the relationship between healing and wholeness is captured by the collect for Mary Magdalene:

*Merciful God,  
your Son restored Mary Magdalene to health  
of body and mind  
and called her to be a witness of his resurrection;  
heal us and make us whole  
that we may serve you  
in the power of his risen life.*

**Canon Deborah Broome**

### New WIT librarian

The new Wellington Institute of Theology librarian is Ashley Edge. Ashley has a postgraduate diploma in Christian Studies from Regent College, Vancouver and a Master of Agricultural Science with honours in Range Management from Lincoln University. He has held a variety of positions in the public and private sectors and currently works in Thorndon.

Ashley and his family worship at St Anne @ Ward, Northland-Wilton. He also belongs to the Church Missionary Society.

Ashley's hours in the WIT Library (located upstairs in the Anglican Centre, Wellington) will be 3:00 – 6:00 pm Wednesday-Friday.

### Advance notice: WIT seminars on Genesis

Saturday 16 October, St Peter's Church, Palmerston North  
Saturday 30 October, WIT Library, Anglican Centre, Wellington  
Saturday 6 November, St Luke's Church, Greytown

**Seminars will run 10:00 am – 3:00 pm. BYO lunch.**

## Mystery or miracle: the search for healing in a suffering world (Part 1)

The heart-wrenching cries of those imploring Jesus to come to their aid amidst the ruins of Haiti devastated by the recent earthquakes have left many struggling to understand where God can be found in such a disaster. While the miracles of those rescued after days buried under rubble have been cause for celebration for some, for many more there is only the mystery of a seemingly absent God unable or unwilling to intervene to protect at least the innocent in terms of the children of Haiti from great suffering and loss.

The current exhibition in Wellington about the destruction of Pompeii by the eruption of Mt Vesuvius in 79 CE is perhaps a timely reminder that natural disasters have occurred throughout world history, continually challenging the theological concept of a created world of order and harmony micromanaged by a loving God, who will intervene in answer to prayer when chaos threatens. The God of the beauty of misty mountain peaks, placid lakes and flower-filled meadows is also the God of earthquake and wind and fire; the God of the tsunami, drought and flood that continue to cause widespread destruction, despite our increasing ability to monitor and predict weather patterns and seismic activity.

Historically, theology has accommodated such phenomena in a variety of ways with the traditional approach taking the Fall account of Genesis 3 and subsequent spread of sin as the explanation. It is perhaps ironic and rather unhelpful theologically that the term “act of God” is now embedded within our vocabulary for events that are deemed uncontrollable natural forces, as voices are still heard today attributing natural disasters to God’s action to curb sinful community behaviour and linking disease to spiritual forces at work within the individuals afflicted.

Another dilemma for Fall theology has been and continues to be the increasing knowledge about the development, variety and profligate fecundity of the natural world and the subsequent waste within its history that includes mass extinction.<sup>1</sup> While it may not be an issue that there are 4500 species of sponge or 6000 species of flatworm,<sup>2</sup> theologically the observable and often merciless interaction within the food chain is potentially problematic if we are too simplistic about the use of biblical passages promising God’s care and provision for his creatures. Many are in fact left to a grisly fate, a graphic example being the frog whose predator the giant water bug shoots poison into its hapless victim, dissolving muscle, bone and organ to a juice that it sucks out of the puncture hole.<sup>3</sup> Such knowledge only confirms what the experience of many has so often shown: that the world has always been a hazardous place of complexity, ambiguity, unpredictability and uncertainty and, despite significant advances with developments in science and technology, remains so today. A seemingly random genetic mutation in the flu virus of 1918 caused the death of around 20 million people in Europe and an estimated 50 million worldwide, hence the concern and reaction to the more

recent threats of bird and swine flu. In 2005, there were over 100,000 new cases of cancer diagnosed in Australia, with projections that there would be over 3000 extra cases per year in 2006 – 2010.<sup>4</sup> In New Zealand, despite the rise in cases appearing to have levelled out, it is the second leading cause of death and the total number of people living with cancer is expected to increase<sup>5</sup>. Despite often quoted biblical verses about not worrying about the future and assurances of all being within God’s plan there is it seems plenty to be concerned about amidst such potentially overwhelming evidence that the plan may have gone somewhat awry or in fact be simply the fabrication of a manipulative and socially constructed religion.

In 1849, ten years before Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* and with growing conflict between science and theology, the words of Tennyson would have resounded with many in asking:

*Are God and Nature then at strife,  
that Nature lends such evil dreams?  
So careful of the type she seems,  
So careless of the single life;<sup>6</sup>*

When the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> century advances in evolutionary biology along with quantum theory, chaos theory, complexity theory, emergence and synchronicity are added to the confrontation, it is difficult to avoid the question of whether the theology of a created world ruled by a loving and sustaining creator has to be restated or even abandoned in its previous forms if we are to retain any intellectual integrity or simply honesty in our faith. However this does not necessarily mean agreeing with Pascal’s notion of *Deus Absconditus*, that God having called forth the universe, has now turned his back to it<sup>7</sup> or accepting the Epicurean paradox that “either God is all-wise and all-powerful but not very benevolent, or he is all-benevolent but not sufficiently wise and powerful to effect his benevolence”.<sup>8</sup>

The answer is perhaps found in addressing the issue of our persistent and understandable determination to understand the workings of the world and the place of our suffering within it; a situation that was eloquently addressed over 2000 years ago in the laments of the psalms and the high poetry of the Old Testament Book of Job. God’s final speech to Job takes him to “where the wild things are”<sup>9</sup> and is a salutary and sobering reminder that we cannot know and hope to understand all of God’s ways. Even however with Paul’s New Testament reminder of 1 Corinthians 13:12 that we can see only dimly and know only in part, our prayers are more often a striving for the miracle rather than for help with the difficult process of accepting the mystery of our faith in relation to the reality of our life experiences. We continue to hope, regardless of our increasing knowledge about the natural world, that we can somehow pray our way into a sanctuary in which we will be free from all harm despite the continuing

**(Continued overleaf)**

## Mystery or miracle: the search for healing in a suffering world (continued)

evidence that God may not have intended and will not, therefore, sustain such a world. The biblical text does not though need the help of the sciences to make the theological point that for Job to understand his suffering he had “to recognise that God neither created a risk-free world nor provided danger-free zones for the pious to be kept free from harm and God will not micromanage such a world to make sure no-one gets hurt”.<sup>10</sup>

This may not be the message that we want to hear within the Christian Church as we struggle to find hope in the face of meaningless tragedy but it may be the only honest way forward for our theology if our faith is to remain on firm biblical foundations. It will challenge a simplistic and literalistic reading of the Eden account but it will also challenge its rejection by those such as Richard Dawkins on the same grounds.

**To be continued. (The author is a layperson with an interest in theology).**

<sup>1</sup> Studies of the fossil record indicate that 99% of species that have emerged on earth have suffered extinction. D. Sheriffs, *Old Testament Theology in Context* (LST), 3.3.

<sup>2</sup> C. Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation: Genesis and Modern Science* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1984) 185.

<sup>3</sup> A. Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper Collins, 1998) 8.

<sup>4</sup> Australian Institute of Health and Welfare Statistics [www.aihw.govt.au](http://www.aihw.govt.au)

<sup>5</sup> 2010 Health Ministry Report, *The Dominion Post*, February 9<sup>th</sup> 2010.

<sup>6</sup> A. Tennyson, 'In Memoriam' cited on <http://theotherpages.org/poems/books/tennyson/tennyson04.html#54>

<sup>7</sup> Dillard, *Pilgrim*, 8.

<sup>8</sup> Hyers, *The Meaning of Creation*, 172. Referring to David Hume's *Dialogues Concerning Natural Religion*, 1779.

<sup>9</sup> T.E. Fretheim, *God and World in The Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 2005) 233.

<sup>10</sup> Fretheim, *God and World*, 237.



## Healing a congregation

“Physician, heal yourself”, is good advice for the Church. Indeed, healing and the search for wholeness are subjects with which the Church must engage, – not just for the sake of individuals to whom the ministry of healing may be offered, but because church communities themselves may also need healing. It is not just people who can get sick: congregations can do so as well.

One of the valuable things about the Natural Church Development survey process used by many parishes in this diocese is its concentration on the overall health of the faith community, as opposed to simply growth or decline in church attendance.

Like any corporate body, a congregation is more than the sum of its parts. How those parts relate to each other can have a huge impact on the ability of the congregation as a whole to carry out mission and ministry. We all want to share the gospel – but if the different members of the body of Christ in a particular place are fighting with one another (either openly or covertly) or withdrawing from any real intimacy, then it will not be good news to anyone who ventures through the doors.

There are many books which focus on the area of congregational health. Two helpful ones I have been (re)reading lately are *Creating a Healthier Church: Family Systems Theory, Leadership, and Congregational Life*, Ronald W Richardson (Fortress Press. Minneapolis. 1996) and *Healthy Congregations: a Systems Approach* by Peter L Steinke (Alban Institute. Herndon VA, 1996, 2006). They both focus on the local congregation as an emotional system, in which the different parts are all busy impacting on each other. The affect of anxiety (chronic or acute) on the way the system functions is a useful emphasis in both.

Steinke compares the congregation to an organism, as susceptible to viruses as any individual human body, only in this case the viruses are those of secrets, accusations, lies and triangulation. Richardson pays more attention to the interaction of the “systems within systems”: the ways in which an individual’s relationships with their spouse, family, family of origin etc all affect how they behave amongst different members of their local congregation. How well leaders are able to differentiate – to be in charge of themselves even when others in the same emotional field are trying to get them to be different from how they really are, to articulate their own positions while still remaining connected to the others – is a key determinant of congregational health.

Both books have questions for reflection and discussion at the end of each chapter: not just to assist readers in processing the information but also to allow some ‘diagnosis and treatment’ of their own congregations. Case studies are used in each book to provide concrete illustrations of what is being covered (these allow the reader to alternate between envy of the well-functioning parishes sketched out and relief that ‘at least I haven’t been anywhere as bad/dysfunctional as that’). Both authors draw on the earlier work of Edwin Friedman. *Generation to Generation: Family Process in Church and Synagogue*. (1985). This is in the WIT Library and well worth a read.

Why does all this matter? At the end of the day how we relate to each other is part of our overall witness to God – or as Jesus himself said, “By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” (John 13:35) Congregational health is important for mission.

**Canon Deborah Broome**

# Wholeness and healing

Most often we see this title the other way round. The change serves to emphasise that the healing of Jesus takes place in the context of *wholeness*. We might recall the times Jesus healed a person and then said 'your faith has saved you', sometimes translated from the Greek as 'made you whole.' In other words, Jesus' healing, whilst it may include physical or emotional or relational, always has an extra dimension, that of our relationship with Him. Hence on receiving healing prayer we give anticipatory thanks to Jesus for what He does, and *who He is*, Saviour and healer.

In a recent talk I found myself focussing on '*connectedness*' – of how important it is that we humans are connected – with creation, with other people, in ourselves and with Jesus. When we are out of this connectedness, healing is needed, to restore us to wholeness, how God means us to be. As we live in this world, events and circumstances occur that can take us out of this connectedness. Thus it can be an illness, an upset, an emotional condition, unresolved hurts from the past that surface in the present or simply busyness, and one gets out of 'sync' with creation. All of these need healing in both a broad sense and a specific sense. Other actions (for example, forgiveness) can help this healing to happen.

Furthermore it is important to remember the *breadth* of where healing may apply. The Order of St Luke describes parameters: '*Dedicated to healing the whole person, body, soul and spirit; and to the healing of situations, of nations and of God's creation*'.

This would suggest there is the important place of our taking responsibility to seek healing for ourselves which brings greater wholeness. Yet there is more: such a commitment as the above suggests concern for healing of situations, nations and creation. The latter 'group' can easily be neglected or incorporated into a wider group of prayer intercessions in worship, and the healing aspect isn't recognised.

As one focuses on the wider parameters of what might be God's concern for the world, the onus is on us to work with God for healing, restoration and indeed wholeness.

## 1) Healing of situations

It can be apparent that where there is sickness, most often others are also affected, spouse, family, friends and Church members. This can be from empathy for the 'symptom-bearer' and worry and anxiety for the loved one in their need. Hence one's prayer will be not only for the person with the diagnosis, it is important to include the *situation* of those who are likely to be also affected.

## 2) Healing of nations

This can apply also *within* a nation, with different ethnicities, faiths, and values. It is likely each has a particular country for which there is a prayer burden and calling. This may be from knowing persons there, or a visit, or some special association.

## 3) Healing of creation

This is very much of an international focus with awareness of climate change which would seem to have a degree of human factors of responsibility. Yet concern for creation and humanity's effect is not new. It is increasingly being realised that planet earth exists in a fragile ecological balance. Perhaps this is a special insight of Genesis where we read 'God said it was good'. Within this, humans have responsibility, yet over the years, exploitation, greed and mindless actions have surely been contributing to climate change with erosion, famines, severe storms and suffering. Where to begin? Begin with me. Can we also pray for the healing of creation?

## 4) Healing of the whole person, body, mind and spirit

Very often a physical symptom is the presenting need when prayer for healing is requested. Being guided in this way is helpful, yet at the same time we must note how the issue affects other parts of one's being, the inner spirit, mind (attitudes and thinking) and one's relationship with Jesus (which probably leads to prayer with more conviction); while we give thanks, knowing God hears and answers every prayer (making times and ways his own). Thus the intent of healing prayer is for the '*whole person*'.

Finally, when one takes a holistic view of the place of healing, what is practised in the Church context connects with what is practised by the medical profession. In many situations, we're in this together. This is recognised from the time of the early church. Unfortunately the English rendering of the Greek does not usually make it clear. In Acts 28 Luke recalls an incident on the island of Malta. After Paul heals Publius' father through prayer (*iasato* from *iaomai*) and laying on of hands, Luke notes others who came were also healed, implying medical attention (*therapeuo*). Both were honoured - Luke as physician and Paul in his ministry.

**The Rev Derek Lightbourne,  
Past Warden, Order of St Luke**

## Contact us

The Wellington Library is located based on the first floor of the Anglican Centre, 18 Eccleston Hill (off Hill Street), Thorndon, Wellington.

Contact Administrator/Librarian Ashley Edge at 04 472 1057 (library)

Contact Director Deborah Broome at 04 475-9085 or [debroome@paradise.net.nz](mailto:debroome@paradise.net.nz)

The Palmerston North Library is located at St Peter's Church, 229 Ruahine St, Palmerston North.

Correspondence should be addressed to the WIT Council c/o the Anglican Centre.