

# THE HEALING COMMUNITY

by Bill Graham

THE HEALING COMMUNITY (2nd edition)

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## "THE HEALING COMMUNITY"

"When Jesus went indoors His disciples asked Him privately, 'Why could we not cast it out?' He said, 'there is no means of casting out this sort but by prayer'" (Mark 9:28,29, New English Bible.)

It is clear from the New Testament that Christian Churches ought to be healing communities. By the phrase 'Healing Communities' I mean something more wonderful and more profound than just the healing of the body or the mind.

I regularly counsel people who have come with very deep needs and problems, and often in such counselling situations it has been brought home clearly to me that Christians fail to exercise this healing ministry. This healing of which I speak can only be wrought through the fellowship and love with which Christian Churches should surround those who come in need. Many of the problems they express have at their heart the need of love and fellowship - the love and fellowship of sympathetic Christians, and ultimately the love and fellowship of God Himself.

Often as I have talked to these people, and as I have thought about them afterwards, the passage from which my text comes, Mark 9:14-29, comes to my mind.

We read in this passage, "When they came back to the disciples they saw a large crowd surrounding them, and lawyers arguing with them". Jesus, accompanied by Peter, James and John, was returning from the Mount on which He had been transfigured. His companions would have fresh in their minds the magnificence of their Master's Divine Glory as it had been manifested to them there on the mountain. As they returned to the other disciples at the foot of the mountain they were confronted by a confusing scene. A large crowd of people had gathered around the disciples, and as they approached they noticed that their persistent accusers, the lawyers, scribes and pharisees, were present. The adversaries had engaged the disciples in an argument. When the crowd saw Jesus approaching they broke up

and surged towards Him. He had come at an unexpected, but a very opportune moment. Perhaps now they would get their money's worth. Jesus, in His power and dignity, strode into the midst of that crowd and asked the question, "What is this argument about?" He soon learned of the failure of the disciples to heal the demon-possessed son of one of the crowd.

Seeing the powerlessness of these disciples, the scribes had immediately siezed upon the opportunity and made full use of it. What better way to discredit the cause of Christ in the eyes of the multitude?

How sad it is that the crowd today judges the power and the genuineness of Christ and His Gospel by the powerlessness of the lives of professing Christians. Every time we fail - every time you, a professing Christian, fail - to display the power that should be yours in Christ's Name, then His Name is brought into disrepute and His power is questioned. Perhaps you have experienced the direct ridicule of the scep-tics, as those disciples did at the foot of the Mount.

But as we read on we read of the encounter of Christ with the young lad and his father, and we are confronted with a searching examination of our own personal lives and our Church life.

"What is this argument about?" said Jesus. A man in the crowd spoke up. "Master, I brought my son to You. He is possessed by a spirit which makes him speechless. Whenever it attacks him it dashes him to the ground and he foams at the mouth, grinding his teeth, and goes rigid. I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they failed".

"Master, I brought my son to You". This man has been attracted to Jesus. He has no doubt heard reports about Jesus. There had been many healing miracles witnessed beforehand. Perhaps he had even seen some. He may have heard Jesus teach. So he comes in search of Jesus with his young son. Here was a man, here was a family, in very real need. There was the physical need of the lad; there was



also a very real social need, for in the primitive community in which they lived a stigma would be attached to a family cursed with such an affliction. There was the mental and emotional need of the boy, and there was the deep, underlying spiritual need of the lad and of the father. Here was a man who had been disillusioned in his search. In seeking Jesus he had found himself in the company of the disciples, and Jesus was absent. When he encountered these disciples he expected that they would be able to help him in some way, and as the story goes on to reveal, his expectation was correct - they should have been able to help him. But he was disappointed. "I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they failed". Is there a ring of something more than disappointment here, of disillusionment, perhaps? This is the experience of many people today. In their need, whatever form it takes, they are attracted to Jesus. They are people with all kinds of needs. Sometimes their needs are material or physical; often they are social or emotional; always there is the underlying spiritual need. And so they come seeking Jesus. In their search for Him they find us, the disciples, gathered at the foot of the Mount - gathered in the midst of all kinds of people - some sympathetic, some sceptical, some lukewarm; - all kinds of people around us, and the seekers come into our midst, needing help. Sometimes their request is an expressed one; sometimes they are confused about, or ignorant of, their own need. They come with an emptiness in their lives which they want filled. They come with a plea, "Can't you see my need? Won't you help me? Won't you welcome me into that fellowship of healing? Won't you show me what I do need?" And all too often they go away - they go away saying, "Oh, they were nice people, but they were too busy to be interested in me. Their friendship was a great help as far as it went, but it never went very deep. While I was with them at Church or at Fellowship or at their Women's Meeting, or whatever else it might have been, it was very nice, but I never found what I wanted. I came looking for you, Jesus". "I asked your disciples to cast it out, but they failed".

There may be people in your Church in that category. You may sit beside one next time you go to Church. And if those people come to your Church at any time, or to any other gathering,

or into the presence of any disciple, and they go away with that cry in their hearts, "I asked your disciples to help, but they couldn't", then woe unto us.

People come into our midst with a need that can only be described as the need of healing, the healing of fellowship and love of Christ and His people. They need our love and our compassion; they need the prayerful ministry of every one of us; they need that healing that Christ has committed to us.

But what is our main concern as we come to Church on Sunday, and many of spend 15 or 20 minutes in the Church grounds chatting? What is our main concern when we gather at other times? Is it the self-indulgence of conversation with our friends, or have we got the eye for, the concern for, the compassion for the individual, the family, the group of people, who have come with a deep, burning need, or are we unaware of their presence? Do we watch for such people?

Jesus continues, "What an unbelieving and perverse generation. How long shall I be with you? How long must I endure you? Bring him to Me". These words were possibly addressed to the whole multitude of people gathered there, but they are especially directed towards the disciples. Notice that Jesus indicates that their unbelief and their perversity is expressed not by the doctrinal beliefs or by the worship that they offer, but by their failure to help in a practical way and show compassion for a person in need. Could that be applied to us? Could such words as those come from the lips of the Saviour towards us? Fortunately for this man, the boy's needs were met. They were met when he was brought to Christ. "Bring him to Me", said Jesus. Just a simple expression of compassion of Christ demonstrated throughout the Gospels, that deep desire so evident throughout the ministry of Jesus, that people should be brought to Him, and should find Him, and should know His saving power. "Bring him to Me". So they brought the boy to Him, and as soon as the spirit saw Him it threw the boy into convulsions and he fell on the ground, and rolled about, foaming at the mouth. Jesus

asked his father, "How long has he been like this?" "From childhood", he replied. "Often it has tried to make an end of him by throwing him into the fire and into the water". What a story of sorrow and distress must have been involved in the background of this brief statement. The problem that Jesus was called upon to deal with was not the problem of a moment, but the problem of a lifetime, with all the complications and complexities which had developed over that time. How often those who are seeking Jesus come with long-standing problems, the problems of a lifetime - a man blind from birth - a tax collector for many years - a woman who had, over a period of years, had five husbands, and then ended up with a defacto husband.

Few people come to us with simple, straightforward problems. Most are very complex, and can rarely be answered by a simple, trite answer. Often the problems stem from all that they have experienced from their early childhood, and the only healing power that we can bring to bear on them may be the love and compassion and fellowship that is supposed to be the characteristic of the Christian Church. The interest of Jesus in the situation we are studying was a total one, and His deep compassion is reflected in the simple words that are recorded. "How long has he been like this?" The father who had been previously disappointed and perhaps somewhat disillusioned, now found a new hope. It only needed that look of concern, that word of compassion and interest, and his deep desire was evoked. That is all it needed just a look of concern, the simple, friendly word of compassion, and the man came out with this deep cry, "If it is at all possible for you, take pity on us and help us". The man makes no profession of a faith which he does not have. So often people feel that if they come to Church, or they come seeking the aid of a Christian, they will be ridiculed for their lack of faith or understanding, or for the way they express what faith they do have. "If it is at all possible for you to help". The man expresses honestly, sincerely, the faith and the unbelief he has.

Perhaps the doubts that the man expressed were partly due to the failure of the disciples to help him, and what a solemn warning this is to us. Could the doubts that many people have about the ability of Christ to help them be the result of us?

But the doubts did not invalidate the faith present in the man. They merely led on to a deeper communion, a deeper knowledge of Christ.

"If it is possible? - everything is possible to one who has faith", replies Jesus. There may be various ways in which we could interpret this verse, but the most probable interpretation is that the person who has faith in Jesus sets no limit to what Jesus can do for him. In effect, Jesus replies, "If you have any faith in Me, then you will set no limits on what I can do for you". The man's response at this point is wonderfully human, expressing the sentiment of most hearts; I'm sure of your heart and mine. He cries out, "I have faith; help me where faith falls short". Is your faith plagued by doubt of any kind? Do not despair! Do not regard yourself as a failure in Christian experience, because that is the common experience of each one of us. John Calvin has commented very aptly on the words. "The man declares that he believes, and yet acknowledges himself to have unbelief. These two statements appear to contradict each other, but there is none of us that does not experience both of these in himself. As our faith is never perfect, it follows that we are partly unbelievers, but God forgives us, and exercises such forbearance towards us as to reckon us believers on account of a small portion of faith".

How many who come seeking Christ are in this category? But how often Christians, by their dogmatic approach to the problems, their unsympathetic handling of the situation and the person, crush that seed of faith, and so make the person sensitive concerning his unbelief. The relationship is broken and healing becomes impossible. How can a person enter into the relationship with another by which this healing ministry can be effective, if that person does not feel that he can express his deepest doubts, his fears, his distress and his inadequacy - without fear of ridicule?

The narrative goes on to describe the miracle of Divine Healing, the miracle of a demon-possessed personality



delivered and restored to harmony. This was a display of the power and the Kingdom of God, for in Christ the Kingdom of God had become present. The Messiah, the Saviour, the Lord Himself had come; the One Who was anointed to preach good tidings to the poor, to bind up the broken-hearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, to comfort all that mourn, to give sight to the blind, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord. The miracle of healing had been wrought.

Finally, we come to the words of our text. "When Jesus went indoors, and His disciples asked Him privately, 'Why could not we cast it out? He said, 'There is no means of casting out this sort but by prayer'" What was the feeling of those apostles as Jesus spoke? Had they flinched at the rebuke of Jesus when He had said, "Oh perverse, faithless generation. How long am I going to bear with you?" Oh that the cold heart of the Church of God today might flinch at those words, and that there might be a change, a revival in our day, of the true expression of Christian fellowship. There was so much activity at the foot of the mountain when Jesus returned from the Mount, but there was a lack of faith on the part of the disciples. They had been successful in healing before. In Mark 6 you can read of that. Why had they failed on this occasion? It seemed that they had taken the whole matter for granted. Because they had succeeded on one occasion, they took it for granted that they must automatically have success on another occasion.

Jesus replies to their question, "Why could not we cast it out?" with the words, "There is no means of casting out this sort but by prayer". One commentator puts it this way, "By prayer He means not merely prayer as a pious exercise, but rather the sense of complete dependence upon God, from which sincere prayer springs. But it was early misunderstood in the sense of the meritorious human, pious activity, as though the disciples needed a greater holiness than that of an ascetic sort. It would seem that the disciples had thought of the gift they had been given in Chapter 6, verse 7, the gift of healing, as given to them in such a way that they had henceforth the disposing of it, and therein had lain their lack of

faith. They had to learn that God's power is not given to men in that way; it is rather ever to be asked for afresh by prayer, and received afresh. To trust in God's power in the sense that we imagine, that we have it in our control and at our disposal, is tantamount to unbelief, for it is really to trust in ourselves instead of in God",

How often Christian Churches, and individual Christian people, are active at the foot of the mountain with their busy programmes, they may be evangelistic programmes; whatever they are, their efforts fail to heal. Why? May I suggest it is the failure of having an outward involvement with the person's needs such as those disciples had, but there is no deep dependence on God; there is no calling on Him for healing; there is no surrounding this person with the love and the fellowship and the combined prayer that must be present to achieve the miracle. We are a healing community - healing in a very deep sense of that word - and as people come into our midst they will only experience that healing if the love and the compassion of Christ is found. This must be so obvious that they cannot mistake it. At the basis of all there must be a very deep dependence upon God, expressed through corporate and individual prayer, for the needs of one another, and the needs of those who come to us with particular problems.

Let us pray:

Lord, we believe, but help us where our belief falls short, and grant that we may so experience the power and the love of the Lord Jesus Christ in our lives, that we may become in a very real measure, a healing community, where others find the power and the love of Christ to meet their needs. We ask it in His Name.  
Amen.

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## THE HEALING COMMUNITY

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