



“Simon’s mother in law was in bed with a fever and they told Jesus about her. So he went to her, took her hand and helped her up. The fever left her and she began to wait on them.” (Mark 1:20-21)

Not for the first time, I was flapping around looking for inspiration for a thought for this month’s Saltshaker. Something vague came to mind and these verses occurred to me as an illustration for what I was considering. On reading them, they did not tally with my original idea but they really struck me for how much we can learn from them, so that is what I would like to share with you this time round.

We are all under the weather at some stage, sometimes more seriously than others. We may pray for ourselves but I certainly find it is a great encouragement if I know that other people are speaking to Jesus on my behalf. And the response? Jesus went to her. Sometimes we do sense a kind of physical presence of Jesus when people pray for us, when we are in a time of need. More than just showing sympathy, Jesus heals Simon’s mother in law. God does not always heal our diseases and infirmity but, as Christians, we know that he can and does.

It strikes me that the lady in questions demonstrates faith in all this and that is an important example too. Jesus helps her up and it is only then that she is said to be healed. Do we also trust Jesus to make things right, whether physical illness, or struggling relationship, a challenge at work or whatever? For this lady, she had that trust.

Then we notice her response. She gets on with life and specifically her first reaction is one of gratitude, not only to Jesus but to all around her, presumably including those who brought her to Jesus in the first place.

Meeting Jesus makes a difference in anyone's life, anyone who allows him to take their hand and who trusts him. This is a great encouragement and possibly also a challenge. Let us all stop and think if there is any aspect of our own lives where we need to take Jesus' hand and believe he will take action to resolve the situation.

CONFESSION

We start our prayer gazing at God. We see how beautiful he is, how kind to us, how much he has given us. Then in that light of God we look at ourselves and see how grubby we are. We have not obeyed him. We have forgotten him. We have said things and thought things we know we shouldn't do. In other words, we are sinners. We don't like being called sinners, but if we are going to be Christians we have to admit that we are sinners. The Bible tells us so. In the third chapter of the bible we read how Adam and Eve sinned, disobeying God. That's what we do. The whole of the Old Testament is laced with complaints that the people of Israel have turned away from God to worship Baal; or they are persecuting the poor, oppressing widows and orphans. When we get to the New Testament we find that each of the Gospels begins with John the Baptist telling people to repent. Jesus then comes on the scene and takes up John's message. St Paul says lots of things about love and the Spirit, but he is very hard on sin. He is very critical of the Corinthians and their many sins. So we can't escape. Like all the rest of the world we are sinners and that really messes up our relationship with God.

That sounds like bad news, but actually it is not just bad news, for if we admit we are sinners God will forgive us straight away. And St John tells us "If we say that we have no sin we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. But if we confess our sins God is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1. John 1:9) It's not like finding you have cancer and having to go through horrible chemotherapy for several months. As soon as we admit we are sinners God can forgive us.

Of course it's not enough just to say we are sinners. We must believe it. And in order to believe it we need to look at our lives and pick out the sins. That is the really painful part. I have always found the worst part of going to confession is preparing for it. That's when I have to admit to myself that I am a sinner. I have to look at the things I have said and the things I have thought and say to myself "That was really bad". "I should not have said that." I have to think of people I have hurt and be sorry for it. That's the really hard part. Our pride is hurt, and that pride must go.

When we do this, we must remember that God loves us and wants to forgive us. When I was at school I had a headmaster who used to beat us if he found we had done anything wrong, so we tried to make sure he didn't find out what we had done. God is not like that. He already knows what we have done. We can't hide it from him. He wants to forgive us. He wants us to come back to him. He can't forgive us until we admit we have sinned. But remember the story of the prodigal son. He just had to come home and he was forgiven. And they had a party. That is what God is like. "There is more joy in the Kingdom of heaven over one sinner who repents than over 99 just persons who need no repentance." Let's give the angels some joy and share in it ourselves by looking carefully at our lives during this Lent and saying sorry to God.

Nicolas Stebbing CR
From The Bell, Christchurch, Borrowdale

(This year, Lent begins on Wednesday 5 March)

God and us

(from a talk given in the chapel at Falcon College)

Today I want to talk about a topic that resonates deeply with many of us, especially with the lifestyle we have here at Falcon College. This topic is the importance of balancing our lives while keeping God involved in everything we do. In this fast-paced world we live in, it's easy to get caught up in the hustle and bustle, often neglecting what truly matters

Life is a delicate dance between work, family, personal growth and our relationship with God. When one aspect dominates, it can lead to stress,

anxiety and a sense of emptiness. Balance allows us to thrive in all areas of our lives.

Studies show that maintaining balance can improve our physical and emotional health. Regularly participating in activities that engage our minds and bodies, such as exercise, hobbies and spending time with loved ones can lead to a more fulfilling life. As 1 Corinthians chapter 6 verses 19-20 reminds us, Do you not know that your bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own, you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your bodies.

Keeping God involved in our lives throughout everything we need to balance is essential. It provides us with guidance, strength and a sense of purpose. When we prioritize our relationship with God, we find clarity in our decisions and peace amidst chaos. Philippians chapter 4 verses 6-7 says, do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.

The role of faith in balance

Our faith can serve as a compass, guiding us through life's challenges. When we face difficult choices, turning to God in prayer can provide us with the wisdom we need to make the right decisions. As proverbs chapter 3 verses 5-6 advises, Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding, in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight.

Keeping God at the center of our lives helps us discover our true purpose. It encourages us to align our actions with our values, fostering a sense of fulfillment that transcends material success.

Now here are some practical steps to achieve balance.

Set priorities. Identify what matters to you and make a conscious effort to allocate time and energy to these priorities.

Create a routine, establishing a daily routine that includes time for prayer, reflection and growth in your relationship with God can help you stay connected to God.

Allocate and spend your time wisely. Time flies without you noticing. And seek help. Remember it's okay to ask for help. Whether it's from a mentor, a pastor or a mental health professional, seeking guidance can provide you with the support you need to maintain balance.

In conclusion, balancing our lives while keeping God involved is not just beneficial, but it's essential for our overall well-being.

As we move forward today, I encourage each of you to take a moment to reflect on your own lives. Are you balancing everything well? Are you keeping God at the center of your decisions?

Let's bow our heads in prayer Dear Heavenly Father, in the midst of our busy lives, we come before you, seeking your guidance and strength. Help us to find balance in our daily activities, to prioritize what truly matters, and to keep you at the center of our hearts. Amen

James Thompson

A little thought

Some flowers blossom best in the sun,
Others do well in the shade
Remember God puts us where we grow best.
Enjoy life in every situation.

The name of Jesus

It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed. Acts 4:10

In the ancient world, names were very important and powerful. So when the authorities questioned Paul and John after they had healed a man, the question they asked was: *By what power or what name did you do this?" Acts 4:7*

The apostles replied that it was in the name of Jesus – adding to make sure they knew who Jesus was and why he was important “whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead”. The gospel in a sentence! Jesus was crucified, dying to save us and then being raised to life by God.

Not content to leave it there, Peter and John added (Verse12): “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved”.

We live in a world where spiritual truth is often considered less important than spiritual experience. In my country there is complete freedom for me to believe in Jesus – no one cares or stops me. But if I say that Jesus is the only way to God or that certain activities are wrong because of what the Bible says, then I can find myself in conflict with society. It seems to society arrogant to claim that what you believe is true and what others believe is not.

But that is what the Bible says: “Salvation is found in no one else”. Let us be faithful to that truth in our world today.

Stuart Weir www.veritesport.org

Drought and flood

Now I say to you in conclusion, life is hard, at times as hard as crucible steel. It has its bleak and difficult moments. Like the ever-flowing waters of the river, life has its moments of drought and its moments of flood. Like the ever-changing cycle of the seasons, life has the soothing warmth of its summers and the piercing chill of its winters. And if one will hold on, he will discover that God walks with him, and that God is able to lift you from the fatigue of despair to the buoyancy of hope, and transform dark and desolate valleys into sunlit paths of inner peace.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

Knee Polishing

Lent is seen as a meditative time of the year, so let me try to suggest some more meditative topics to pray and think over.

Sunday : God speaking to us
Monday : how I put my faith into practice
Tuesday : my thought processes
Wednesday : my use of money
Thursday : honouring God with my body
Friday : my use of time
Saturday : am I right with God?

Three clergymen met for coffee to discuss the problems in their respective parishes. The first one complains that he has so many mice in the church buildings and he has set traps but this has not solved the problem. The second one says he is also having the same problem and that no matter how much poison he puts down they still keep coming. The third priest reports that he too had a mouse problem and goes on to explain how he coped, "I baptized every one of them and made them members of the congregation and I haven't seen them since!"

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