



***He restores my soul.
Healing the broken hearted.***

Dear Friends,

At our monthly gathering on January 29, we held a special service to mark the season of prayer for Christian Unity. The theme focussed on Jesus' healing from Mark 7 of the man who was deaf and who couldn't speak. "Everything he does is wonderful" was the reaction of the people to this healing. That is what we affirm as Christians. But how many of us really believe it? How many of us really believe him? Many times over the last thirty-eight years Jesus has 'visited' us here in Northern Ireland. Often we have not recognised his presence. We have not acknowledged his healing touch or the power that stopped us from totally destroying ourselves. For years we were collectively like the madman of Gerasa, chained to our past, isolated in the eyes of the world as a place of nightmare, self-harming with our insane hatreds and ancestral bigotries, consumed with fear and suspicion of the 'other', be that other an individual, a group, a political party, or a religious denomination. But throughout those years also something else was happening. People not just here, but all over the world were praying for us and I believe it was that prayer that created the seismic shift that enabled politicians to reach the state of being at least partially clothed and in their right mind in order to reach the various agreements that have been reached. Yes, we still have a long way to go in order to have those

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agreements fully implemented, (although in another sense we are so near.) We have travelled far, but we're not there yet. We in the churches have not done enough telling of the wonderful things God has done for us and how merciful he has been. Perhaps we haven't even wanted all the demons destroyed because some of them are very dear to us and we wouldn't know who we were without them. There have not been enough of us willing to put our heads above the ramparts of our own particular denomination or political allegiance, and sadly sometimes our political allegiance takes precedence over our allegiance to the One who said, "You shall have no other gods before me." We who should have known how to tell the story best, we who claim to have first hand experience of him have been faltering in our witness and negligent in becoming at least part of the answer to the prayer of Jesus that we might be one so that the world would believe. I actually don't like the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity very much because so often it can become the great annual conscience salver. We do our bit for one week and that's it. I know that that is not the case everywhere, but how far up our agenda is it? I am of the firm belief that it's top of Jesus' agenda for the churches in Ireland and, indeed, around the world, but where is it on ours?

Jesus has been here before – many times. Could it be that, at this time, he will revisit us in a special way. What will he find? He'll still find the silent majority who really don't want to be disturbed. He'll find a community at large that still isn't hearing properly, a community that has a speech impediment, because they have not been able to listen or have refused to hear those things that would set people free so that our children and our grandchildren might inherit a land whose hallmarks were justice, mercy, truth and peace, accompanied by a generosity of spirit and a mutual hospitality.

We who bear the name Christian cannot point the finger at the community at large if we haven't recognised our own need for the touch of Jesus. Touch is a bad word now in our society. We shy away from it for fear we will be misunderstood or accused of something twisted and dark. And yet, touch is precisely what we need, the healing touch of the only one who can unstop our ears and loosen our tongues, the only one who fully knows our unique condition. Do we have the faith and the courage to bring one another, as individuals and as whole churches to Jesus, begging him to touch us that we might yet be the people of God that he had in his mind and heart from the very beginning? But I wonder, when he

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comes, will he sigh? Will he sigh because after all this time we still do not hear or understand the sort of Kingdom he comes to bring?

As we look ahead to the rest of the year that lies waiting for us, we know that it will hold many challenges. We don't know what the future holds politically. Church attendance is declining. We're weary with searching for new ways to interest people in things of the faith or in the peacemaking road. Global tensions hit us even here in Northern Ireland. Insecurity, fear of the unknown, weariness and re-

sulting apathy threaten to put us back into the chains or the madness of yesteryear.

But if we have responded to his touch, then we will hear his word, "Be opened!" We will speak out, maybe for the first time in our lives with clarity, courage, conviction and faith, and we will do so as a united body of Christians who have discovered that their labels are secondary to the reality of belonging to Jesus, and the first words we will say together will be, "Everything he does is wonderful.

He has even healed us, we who were deaf and mute!"

But there is one caveat. If we go with the flow of what God is doing, then we, too, will sigh. We will sigh because now we are in the spotlight and there is no longer any earthly hiding place. We will sigh because we have nailed our colours to the mast and have a pretty good idea where such commitment will lead us. So we need to think well and pray hard before we respond to the command, not the request or the invitation, but the command of Jesus, "Be opened!". *Ruth*

Dates for your diary

Can you give up one day of your time during Lent?

LENTEN REFLECTION DAY

ButWhere is God?

Saturday 10 March 2007

2.00 pm - 6.00 pm

Preparing for the Easter Season

Facilitators:

Rev Ruth Patterson
Noreen O' Rourke

ALL WELCOME

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MONTHLY MEETING

Monday 26 February 2007

Continuing with our special prayers & anointing for healing for ourselves;

friends;

family;

and those who have asked us for prayers.

The evening starts at 8.00 pm & finishes with tea/coffee at approx 9.30 pm.

ALL WELCOME