

Matthew 9: 1 – 8

'Authority: Forgiveness and Healing'

Introduction ...

What, would you say, got Jesus into most trouble in his earthly ministry?

Tonight's reading from Matthew's gospel puts both healing and forgiveness in the spotlight.

John Proctor in his commentary writes this:

'Which was the more difficult for Jesus in Galilee?

Healing made him many friends

Forgiveness started to make him enemies ...

In the long run – forgiveness will become the bigger issue.'

Challenging their control ...

I think there's something important in this. Why should, why did – proclaiming forgiveness bring more opposition than healing?

It's to do with a challenge to authority and control.

In the Jewish culture of Jesus' day – there were other healers ... and those who would claim to be offering healing through the accepted medical practices of the day wouldn't be able to explain what they were doing in the ways we would now expect ... and hard to argue with someone who has clearly recovered from an illness ... so healing was not a challenge – directly – to the Jewish leaders.

Whereas the forgiveness of sins ... that was God's job through the Temple – religious – system which the Jewish priests were in charge of. This was a challenge to their control and authority ... hence the opposition.

Today ...

How might this play out today? The areas may differ ... but it's still about authority and control.

For the Church ...

Well, have you noticed that it's fine when the church is providing Food Banks – praise from politicians in power ... but this rapidly changes to criticism when the church makes noises about child poverty ... It's a challenge to the Government's authority and control.

For us as individuals ... too, this Gospel passage is an invitation to look in our own lives:

In which areas of our lives do we like to be in control?

Is it perhaps about 'how things are done' –

in our family ...

our work place

... here in church?

Is it about how we spend our time –

or our money

or use our abilities?

Which aspects of our lives do we tense up about if there's a challenge presented or an alternative offered?

When you feel that tensing up ... note it ... talk with Jesus about it ... ask for his help to respond to his leading about it.

Conclusion ...

In a few moments, we'll have a short time of quiet to reflect on this:

Healing and forgiveness were present in our reading

... Forgiveness was shown to be the more important of the two by the tension and resistance it met. It challenged the authority and control of some ... and this led to a negative response from them.

As we bring our lives to the light of Jesus – are there areas for us where we are resisting change because we want to hold on to our control or authority?