

A sermon preached by Canon Maggie Guite

Trinity and healing

Linton, 27th May 2018

Romans 8.12-17

John 3.1-17

I wonder if any of you here enjoy sailing – or, at least, have ever been sailing. My husband, Malcolm is a keen sailor, but unfortunately I don't enjoy it too much, so when he sails, it has to be with someone else. Yesterday, Oriel O'Loughlin took him sailing off the Suffolk coast, which was a real treat for him.

But though I don't sail willingly, we quite often go on a holiday or day out to walk along a foreshore – perhaps Burnham Overy Staithe in Norfolk - or through a boatyard, such as Andy Seedhouse's in Woodbridge - to admire the sailing boats drawn up there while Malcolm fantasises about which one he'd like to buy. And if you've ever walked among sailing boats like that, you'll know there's something you can scarcely avoid: if there's the slightest breath of wind, there's a noise, a perpetual tinkling and tapping – the sound of rigging hitting the masts in the wind. It's a very distinctive music. If you've ever heard it, can you recall it now, in your mind's ear...

Would you describe that as the noise of the wind, or the sound of the boats?...Of course, it's both: wind and boats together play their tune, and when the sails are hoisted, after a great flapping and slapping, once the sails are set, the boats will travel with the wind, to who knows where?

'The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you don't know where it comes from or where it goes', says Jesus. 'So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit' (John 3.8).

Last week's Bible reading spoke of the Spirit of God, coming with a sound like a mighty wind, and it showed us the disciples, their sails being set, catching the wind and being sent on their way sharing the mission of God's love for the world.

But, every time we pray we can think of it as a hoisting of our sails to catch the wind of the Spirit. Where will it take us? We can't know exactly. Of course, we can state the destination we wish for – that is, we can put our hand to the tiller - and very often, as we cooperate with the wind, we can hope to end up where we originally wanted. But sometimes the wind and the tides of God's loving purposes take us somewhere quite unexpected – indeed, we may be quite at sea, for a while. Christian prayer, like sailing, has an element of risk: we're hoisting our sails to the living Spirit, seeking the mind of Christ as we pray in his name, and not just our own mind, turning back to discover the heart of our desires, which so often has been overlaid and obscured by the temporal and transitory desires of our hearts. In other words, when we pray, if we do it with openness (which is not necessarily only done through 'open' and unstructured prayer, but can happen in set prayers and liturgy, too) – yes, if we pray with open hearts, we're being caught up in the movement and will of the Trinity, Creator, Word and Spirit. We don't quite know where this prayer comes from or where it goes; this is how it is when we hoist our sails to the Spirit.

This Sunday we're offering for the first time in a Sunday service the opportunity to sit down with a couple of others who will be available to pray for healing and wholeness. It might be that you seek healing for yourself – perhaps a physical healing; but it could be an emotional or spiritual need, or an unhealed relationship that makes you want to hoist the sail of your prayer to the Spirit, and see where it takes you. Equally, it may be that it's someone else's troubles which move you to seek the solidarity of others in prayer, or even a larger situation in the world or society which you see in need of healing. Of course, we pray about all these things together, as a church family when we offer our general intercessions in the service, and probably you pray for healing and wholeness for self, others and the world at home in your daily life. But sometimes we need to set the sails of our prayer to the Spirit with a particular kind of deliberation; sometimes we wonder if we're praying at all, or just worrying in our private quietness. And then it can help to pray with others, to know and look back to a point when these concerns were really given voice by being shared in God's presence. After all, Jesus said that where two or three are gathered in God's presence, then there's a special promise of his presence with them. Even the very fact that it may feel awkward to sit down with someone else, and ask them to pray with you, may be part of the deliberation that's needed really to hoist up the sails; we can guess that Nicodemus found it awkward to come to Jesus and ask to be taught about true life: that's why he came discreetly, by night. But what a revelation was granted to him when he made that effort, got over that threshold of awkwardness, not remaining content with simply hanging around and listening to the Lord from the edge of the crowd. So,

risking asking others to pray with you, even though it may feel strange, can be an important part of hoisting your sails to the wind.

This is how it will work: when it comes to the time for Communion, two members of our congregation who have been invited to share this ministry- this week it will be Sue Filby and Sarah King – will come up to Communion first, so as then to make themselves available in the Resurrection Chapel. Anyone who would like to be prayed with is invited, then, to come to the Communion rail – or receive it standing in the normal place – and then slip into the chapel. We've chosen it as a discreet and peaceful space where you can talk and pray quietly without being overheard. If the prayer team members are sitting with someone else, find a place to sit apart, until they're ready.

When they join you – or you join them – they'll check that they know your name (not everyone in this congregation is intimately acquainted with everyone else!), and ask you who or what you're seeking prayer for. You can tell them as little or as much as you want about the situation which is the focus of your concerns. You might simply say, 'I want prayer for myself', or 'I want to share prayer for Ethel – but I'd rather to say any more than that' But equally, you could describe and name the trouble, the illness or the situation briefly so that they can put their prayer into more explicit words before God. If you like – and only if you like – they may lay a hand lightly on your shoulder as a gesture of solidarity in the Spirit while they pray, and then your concern will be brought to God, perhaps both in their

own words, but certainly in the Church of England's
brief prayer for wholeness and healing:

May Christ bring you (or whoever is being prayed for)
wholeness
of body, mind and spirit,
deliver you from every evil,
and give you his peace.

If you want to join in praying out loud yourself, of
course you can. But you might prefer to pray in
silence, and stay awhile, to rest in God's presence.

And where will it take you? What will be the result of
opening up to God in this particular way? Well, of
course, we can't exactly say. The wind blows where
it wills...but we can trust that such a deliberate act
of opening up to the Spirit in solidarity with others
will not be fruitless. Sometimes such prayer does
seem to lead to something outstanding happening –
what people would call a miracle; or a healing or
cure much faster than we might have expected.
Sometimes it leads to a greater sense of peace,
patience or courage to face a situation, or even

death itself ; the very act of opening up and trusting
your fellow-Christians with your concerns may be a
strength in itself, and bring a greater awareness of
God's love coming to you through other people.
And you may simply find yourself closer to God,
because you've come to him with such deliberation;
the moment of praying with others in church might
be for you like the pillar which Jacob set up after
he'd had his dream of the heavenly ladder; you can
look back to that moment like an anchor in time
when you felt tossed about, and say, 'yes, it really did
happen. I really did pray. And I can be sure that
God heard, whatever the outcome it leads to.'

In the end, our greatest wholeness is to join in the life
of the Trinity, which is our destiny for all eternity.
So, hoist your sails to the wind of the Spirit, whether
or not this ministry of prayer for healing and
wholeness is for you today. The whole of this
service is an invitation and an opportunity.

Let us take it.

May Christ bring you
*(or whoever is being
prayed for)* wholeness
of body, mind and
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