

3rd May 2020 10am Support from Unexpected People
Talk by Lindsey Attwood, service led by Val Whiteman,
Reading and prayerful response by Andrew Attwood
Texts: Psalm 97 and Luke 8:1-3

[Val Whiteman:]

Welcome everyone to this service.

It's lovely to see everybody in spirit, at least, if not in reality. We pray that you will be blessed by the service this morning. It should be our "All-In" service. But obviously we're "all-in" around our own firesides, our own homes.

Lindsey and Andrew are going to be speaking, and I'm leading the service this morning. If I can just do the Anglican thing of doing notices, please, not too many. But at 6pm there's a Healing and Refreshing service as usual on the first Sunday of the month. And Lynda and Ann are going to be talking about the Lord is my Shepherd. And then there's a youth meeting at 7:30 this evening. And right after this service, there's a children's meeting, can I also alert you to the fact that if you've got any problems, any worries at all about getting food, pharmacy, anything at all, there's the COVID-19 groups that you can find a link to off our news page. So for today, you'll need a small piece of paper and a pen or pencil, and of course, your Bible.

And there are children's activities available. And Michelle sent these around and they're on the weekly newsletter. The "spice biscuits" recipe on the newsletter looks really good. Only, please would you mind making them after the service rather than during it?

So today we're thinking about the women who travelled with Jesus and his disciples, and how he'd healed them. And Lindsey is going to tell us more about that from a reading in Luke. And it's sort of carrying on our series from people who are disciples of Jesus, but these are slightly unusual.

So as a starter sort of icebreaker thing that we always do, can I ask you first of all, the thing about last week that was worst for you - the worst thing? And then if you wouldn't mind, the best thing? If you're with somebody, then talk about it. If not, write it down, then maybe share it on WhatsApp or Facebook or wherever you share things. So I'll give you a moment or two to do that.

It's only when you start thinking about worst and best, certainly the best things, some amazing, really lovely, quite small answers to prayer, but nonetheless, wonderful ones: this morning I heard the cuckoo for the first time. That's absolutely brilliant. It just lightens my day. So think about the good things, which is why I asked you to do them second, the good things that we've had happen.

So we think about this time we're away from family and friends. And quite often we have time on our hands to think about a lot of things. And sometimes this is a time when God can use our thoughts and memories, to bring things to mind that need healing or forgiving or even, like I've just said, being thankful about. And today we're going to think about those things for us. So if you have a small piece of paper, I would like you to take that small piece of paper and think about anything that's on your mind which worries you: something, maybe, or someone you're concerned about. It's sort of a giving to God, a confession, but if you would write just a word or two on that paper now, and then we're going to do an activity with it.

Okay, so if you've written your word, what I'd like you to do is now fold your paper in half,

fold it in half again
in half again
in half again,
and if you can, in half again.

So you should have a tiny, tiny piece of paper. Now I'd like you to tear it in two. Now I know there's going to be somebody who tears telephone directories for a living who's going to be able to do this. But for most of us, for the rest of us, it's impossible. So what I would like you to do now is to *unfold* your paper.

So it's totally unfolded. Now tear it in two.
I'd like you to hold it on your hand.

Okay, the tear is a sign that you're giving this problem, this concern, this person to God. It's into God's keeping now, it's much easier for us all to share with God if we hold our problems open before him, rather than hiding them away tightly hidden like we did before. So I'm going to pray.

Father, God, we thank you that you care deeply for us, and that you want to hear about and deal with our worries, our fears and our concerns. We know you are a healing God. But we know also that if we keep these things tightly folded in our hearts, we can't give them to you.

So today as we listen and learn, we pray that we may have open hearts, and that you will heal as you did long ago.

Amen.

I have a particular activity for children or indeed bored adults, [...] and it's two hearts.

If you'd like to do this, we can use it later on in the service, in the intercessions. So if you have the bigger heart and you put "Jesus heals" on that, [ideally on coloured paper, or you could colour them in.] Then you stick the smaller heart in front of the bigger one. So it's quite loose. And then you put on there. What do you want healing for: persons, people's fears, whatever.

[...]

We can't do sung worship, which is always a great sadness to me at this time - I think it's strangely one of the worst things about having to do this online. So I'm going to read a psalm for worship. So we've given the things to God that are concerning us. We're forgiven before God, and he has our problems in his keeping. And now we're reminded about what a great God he is. So if you'd like to find your Bibles, it's Psalm 97.

If you haven't got the Bible to hand or you prefer, imagine the pictures that the psalmist makes of God. This is the God we worship. He's bigger than the problems we have, and his promises are far, far greater. So Psalm 97:

¹ The LORD reigns, let the earth be glad;
let the distant shores rejoice.

² Clouds and thick darkness surround him;
righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne.

³ Fire goes before him
and consumes his foes on every side.

⁴ His lightning lights up the world;
the earth sees and trembles.

- ⁵ The mountains melt like wax before the LORD,
before the Lord of all the earth.
- ⁶ The heavens proclaim his righteousness,
and all peoples see his glory.
- ⁷ All who worship images are put to shame,
those who boast in idols –
worship him, all you gods!
- ⁸ Zion hears and rejoices
and the villages of Judah are glad
because of your judgments, LORD.
- ⁹ For you, LORD, are the Most High over all the earth;
you are exalted far above all gods.
- ¹⁰ Let those who love the LORD hate evil,
for he guards the lives of his faithful ones
and delivers them from the hand of the wicked.
- ¹¹ Light shines on the righteous
and joy on the upright in heart.
- ¹² Rejoice in the LORD, you who are righteous,
and praise his holy name.

Amen.

So we spend a moment in silence reflecting on that. And then Andrew will read us the Bible passage.

[Andrew Attwood:]
Okay, thank you, Val.

This is the reading from Luke chapter 8 verses 1 to 3

¹ After this, Jesus travelled about from one town and village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, ² and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out;

³ Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.

I'll just hand over to Lindsey now.

[Lindsey Attwood:]

Good morning. And for those who don't know who I am, I'm Lindsey, and I'm married to Andrew and I'm often part of the "All-In" service that we do once a month.

It probably seems quite a long time ago now, but in our "All-In" Sundays as Val was saying, we were looking at the people who follow Jesus. And we actually looked at James and John, who are the Sons of Thunder, Mary and Martha, and Peter and Andrew, and particularly Andrew actually, all unique in their characters and what they did.

But today, a bit different, we're looking at a group of ordinary women who follow Jesus, recorded by Luke. And I want to concentrate on the healing aspect of the story and how it brings freedom.

So we meet these women in Luke 8 under the heading of the Parable of the Sower.

Jesus was going about from village to village, proclaiming the Good News of the kingdom of God. And he was accompanied by his disciples, including some women.

I did a little bit of research on this because I thought it'd be a good idea to give a bit of background to this small but very important inclusion of this in story. Interestingly, I think this is right, I'm sure someone will correct me if I'm wrong, I think Luke is the only gospel writer who gives us the detail of these women. And you often find in Luke's gospel, he speaks favourably of women and their love of Jesus. And in fact, all the gospel writers testify to Jesus treating women with respect, frequently responding in ways that reject the cultural norm. You find that Jesus recognises their dignity, their desires and their gifts. And again, I think, and again, I haven't done masses of research, but I think there are more women in the gospel of Luke than any other gospel.

If you remember, you know your Bible, he includes the Magnificat, found at the beginning of the gospel, which is where Mary the mother of Jesus sings in response to her conceiving Jesus. It's a beautiful, beautiful song.

And in Luke 7, just before the Parable of the Sower, if you look back just before the reading in Luke 8, you see the woman at Simon the Pharisee's house wiping Jesus' feet with her tears because he's forgiven her. And Luke chooses to recall this as an amazing act of love, and uses it as a contrast to the lack of love actually from Simon - the most religious person, a Pharisee.

Women at this time were often forgotten. Their inclusion would have been unusual for the Jews. Luke shows that Jesus welcomed everyone, including those that are often out of sight. And he still does this today, not only to women, but anybody who feels out of sight, he sees them and he can include them.

So Andrew read, the passage says, they've been cured interestingly of evil spirits and diseases. It's like a little by-product, it's almost like you've missed it if you didn't see it. They were Mary Magdalene, Joanna the wife of Chuza, the manager of Herod's household and Susanna and many others. Now many people often know about Mary Magdalene, because famously, we know she had seven spirits driven out of her, which we don't know what they were, but she was also interestingly the first person to see the risen Jesus, an incredible fact that Luke records, because often the women, if they saw things, were not actually counted, it's very weird in those times.

We know that Chuza, who was the husband of Joanna, was the manager of Herod's household. So he would have been probably fairly rich, which may well have helped financing the mission. And if you think that through, logically, it could have been that Jesus was actually receiving help from the house of Herod, who was actually an enemy: very interesting.

Luke mentions the healing of these women as they are on the journey with Jesus and his disciples. And as a result, we know they helped in practical ways for the mission. One way was financially - again, another interesting fact, counter-cultural at the time, a man and his male disciples being financially supported by women. Jesus, it seems, was not constrained by social and religious customs. And it showed intense humility. And the fact that he needed the help of others. He didn't actually choose to do it alone. He needed other people.

So the question I want to ask is, did these women follow Jesus in response to their healing?

I imagine the answer is probably yes. Maybe out of thankfulness and joy. They were so full of excitement at what he'd done, about the Kingdom of God, that they gave literally everything to join in. And they wanted others to know the same freedom and joy that they had received.

And later in Luke, in Luke 8, you actually see just a little bit further on that Jesus heals the man with many demons. And immediately after his healing, he's incredible because he wants to follow Jesus, he's just so amazed. But Jesus sends him on a mission to stay and tell his village about what he had done.

Conversely, we also know that not everyone who was healed followed Jesus. We see that when he healed the 10 lepers that only one was grateful.

That's another question: maybe our gratitude and thankfulness are an important part of healing. It opens our eyes, I think, to see who Jesus really is.

In the last couple of days, I've just started watching something called "The Chosen", a series about Jesus and his disciples, partly because Andrew had it up on YouTube on our TV. And I'm saying, What's that? So I started to think, Oh, I need to watch this. I had a little watch. And if you're interested, it's on YouTube¹, or you can download the app. If you look, if you Google "The Chosen", you can actually download it as an app because it's actually not on normal telly, it's being crowdfunded. And maybe lots of you've seen it already. But I was really struck and talking about Mary Magdalene is a beautiful scene. And I think it's the second episode where Jesus heals Mary Magdalene, and quotes the words from Isaiah 43 verse 1.

But now, this is what the LORD says –

he who created you, Jacob,

he who formed you, Israel:

'Do not fear, for I have redeemed you;

I have summoned you by name; you are mine.

I just want you to wait for a minute. And I want you to imagine Jesus saying this to you. Just imagine you are home. Close your eyes for one minute and just imagine that he's saying these words to you.

Do not fear, for I have redeemed you. I have summoned you by name. You are mine.

Isn't that incredible, that Jesus actually wants to look in our face, and remind us that we belong to Him?

From this, there's an obvious question, how do we relate this story of 2,000 years ago to ourselves? It's great to see this in the Bible. And we see this and we think, well, that's great for them. But what about now?

So how much do we actually believe and have faith that God can do more than we imagine?

Maybe a lot of us have been Christians for a long time, or we may just have a very small faith – we don't actually know what we think. And we've had our faith tested, and we actually feel sort of disappointed.

Maybe you have need of healing yourself in some way. Or perhaps you're praying for a friend or family member, and you're not sure where God is in it all.

Maybe you are in a desert place yourself.

1 <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCBXOFnNTULFaAnj24PAeblg>

And this is a painting I wanted to share, with calligraphy, that I did about 18 months ago for The Well healing Centre in Leamington Spa. And when Ann Hibberd was wanting to create this centre in Leamington Spa, for healing, she came and asked me whether I would do some work for her. It took me many months to do but I did five images that were put into five prayer rooms.

I'm hoping that they actually do something, I really do hope, but I wanted to choose this one to share as I think it's about a desert place.

And it's a place that actually people can really find themselves in, and it can feel like life's really hard, and especially at the minute, maybe with the coronavirus, for some people, it feels very difficult.

Mary Magdalene herself may well have been in a desert place where there seemed to be no answers for her condition.

But this image has a promise and one that actually only God can do. And it's about actually through Jesus and the Cross actually, which provides the water that we need to live, and it's the fact that he brings pools of water, and he brings flowing springs out of actually really hard ground, the places that seem almost impossible.

I also thought it would be worth rather than me trying to share a famous person who's met with Jesus, I thought I'd talk about my own recent journey with Jesus just to really show you - to keep it real.

I found myself in the last few weeks Jesus calling me to be closer to him. In a bizarre way, social isolation on forced "time out" has helped. I know that in some areas of my life, I need healing, like anybody. And it's easy that busyness, or life in general, can actually mask areas that actually need attention. It's quite easy to find other things to do or to get up each day and to actually carry on quite normally.

But actually, sometimes God can see things in us.

I've sensed Jesus, even last night actually, as I was praying, holding me to him. And in a strange way, it sounds good, but it's also quite scary. To be healed by Jesus or to allow him in, means to sort of allow an access to us, the real naked us, and it needs us to be humble, to allow him to get close.



I know he's addressing things in me like striving, and the fact that there are some things I just can't control and I quite like to control things. I can be quite capable but some things I just can't control, and I'm on a journey with him at the minute.

Do I trust him and I can't provide everything I need? And am I prepared to let go of things in my own understanding?

I'm also learning about gratefulness and thankfulness and - he jokes with me sometimes, Lindsey, you see the glass half empty sometimes - a bit like my dad, I think (sorry, Dad!). But I'm learning to be thankful for what I see, what I see him doing.

I do realise that healing isn't always instant. I want to encourage people in that it's a process. And I think it needs our cooperation on the journey as well.

And I often hear a small voice saying, Have faith, I hear you and I know what's best for you.

So I just think I want to end with, during this time of social isolation, I think we need the presence of Jesus more than ever. It's almost allowing us to see that we do need him more than ever.

But we also need a fresh outpouring of his healing power. We need to be reminded that Jesus is still the Messiah. And he's still King at this time. Amen.

[Andrew Attwood:]

Thank you, Lindsey. So, we're going to respond in a moment in prayer. And maybe this will be an opportunity for you to bring whatever healing needs or constraining issues, to a time of receiving from God. But just as a preamble to that, I wanted to share another story, another healing story just to help us focus on the power of Jesus.

I can remember a few years ago when we were still based in Leamington, and we used to go to the peace festival, as a church, and we'd set up a kind of medium-sized marquee and offer free prayer for healing for anyone walking by. There were lots of other stores that were charging for different kinds of services, if you like, but we offered it for free, obviously, because that's what Jesus says.

And I remember when we got to the end of one long, long day where we dealt with quite a number of people coming through and we were pretty tired. And just as we're about to kind of close up for the evening, this guy in his 70s, I guess, kind of came through the door, asking for prayer for his arm. Yeah, he had a problem with his arm. And he had had a particular problem with that arm for years and years where he had continuous nerve pain from shoulder to fingers down one side, and he'd had multiple treatments, he'd been to the doctors, he'd had hospital treatment, and he'd even experimented with a whole range of New Age treatments, but nothing, absolutely nothing had worked over a number of years of trying.

Myself and a friend of mine, Jim, we kind of looked at each other because we were absolutely worn out by the end of the day, and we said, Well, okay, we can give you five minutes. But we're closing shop soon, we can pray briefly. We probably had zero faith. This guy sat in a chair. And we gently put our hands on his shoulders. With his permission, we prayed and we asked in Jesus' name that something would happen.

And within about two minutes of just quietly praying, this guy took his glasses off. And he said, What's going on? What on earth is going on? And he moved his arm around, he could he could get mobility that he didn't have before. And all of the tingling, all of the permanent pain he had - just had vanished. And myself and Jim, who were the pray-ers, we were more shocked than he was, because we didn't really have a sense of faith or conviction about what we were doing. We just asked that Jesus would do something while we were ready to go home.

So with that in mind, can we now just move into a time of response where we come not in our own strength, but we come because Jesus can do what only Jesus can do. So let's pray.

What I want you to do is, just perhaps if it helps, close your eyes and do a quick review, what is it that you need help with at this time?

In the stillness,

Just breathe slowly and just do a review. What do you need Jesus to do at this time?

I'm just going to pray that we think about this in his presence. Lord, would you open Heaven's door so that we are aware that you are here?

Would you reach out now Lord, would you show us that you are here?

I just want to encourage you now, because we know what Jesus is like, remember what he did for those grateful women. Name again what it is you need: a physical healing, mental healing, anxiety concerns, stress, things that bind you, things that restrict you and oppress you. What is it you need him to set you free from? Just say it to him - or even write it down if you need to do it that way. Tell him what you need.

Now we know that Jesus hears: Jesus heard the women in the story that Lindsey spoke about. He's hearing you right now. So maybe open your hands. If you wish, if you need to, maybe stand, as a way of saying "I'm here, Lord," open your hands open your heart, like Val said, open up to the possibility that Jesus wants to do something new.

Let's be open.

And let's wait.

Come Holy Spirit.

Come Holy Spirit.

We wait on God for the touch of Jesus who heals.

Come Holy Spirit.

So begin to receive his touch.

Begin to receive what he wants to do. Just make yourself aware.

Maybe be open to what he is saying to you.

Come Holy Spirit.

So in line with this, this atmosphere, this time of being open to his presence, I just want to say, be healed, in the name of Jesus.

Be healed of your need.

Be set free.

In the name of Jesus Christ.

Be set free.

To give you some more time to receive. We're going to play a video² in a moment, which is a hymn. If you wish you can join in with the words which will also be on the screen or you can just let that be another time to let what Jesus is doing go in. So we'll just play this video now as part of our response.

Turn your eyes upon Jesus
Look full in His wonderful face
And the things of earth will grow strangely dim
In the light of His glory and grace

Turn your eyes to the hillside
Where justice and mercy embraced
There the Son of God gave His life for us
And our measureless debt was erased

Chorus:

Jesus, to You we lift our eyes
Jesus, our glory and our prize
We adore You, behold You, our Saviour ever true
Oh Jesus, we turn our eyes to you

Turn your eyes to the morning
And see Christ the lion awake
What a glorious dawn, fear of death is gone
For we carry His life in our veins

Chorus

Turn your eyes to the heavens
Our King will return for His own
Every knee will bow, every tongue will shout
'All glory to Jesus alone!'

Chorus x 2

[Val Whiteman:]

To begin to think about what Jesus can do and has done for us, we're going to turn to prayer now.

Because as Jesus has blessed us so we as community can pray and bless others. So I want us to spend some time praying for the world, for our country, for our town, at this time of pandemic, because the problems seem absolutely

² See note at end for link to video.

overwhelming. So before we start our intercessions, let's go back and remember for a moment the greatness of our God. And we recall this in the words of Psalm 97, "the Lord reigns, Let the earth be glad." So let's pray.

Thank you, Father, that you are the creator of our universe, the one who holds it all in being by your word of power. Thank you that you are so much greater than our problems, our worries. Thank you that, through Jesus, you've given us a way back to you, that we are forgiven and made new in you. Thank you that we are healed in you.

Now we pray for our world. Let us remember how unequal our world is. We ask forgiveness, O Lord, our God, that we have so much while others have so little. Please help us to share what we have. We think especially as refugees, and those in danger because of war and upheaval, those who face Coronavirus in addition to the losses they've already suffered. And we pray for all those who try to help them and for mercy for them.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for our country, asking you to bless all our politicians who are trying to help. We pray that you will give them wisdom, that you'll give them insight, so that we can come out of this difficult time.

We pray for the small businesses, the large businesses, who are suffering, for employees who fear for their livelihoods.

And we also pray for all those who are trying to help us to get through this time. Not only the NHS, but also carers, transport drivers, public transport drivers, shop assistants, and the whole army of volunteers to help with deliveries. We thank you for their service and pray that you will keep them in safety. We all know someone who's serving the community, so in a moment of quiet, bring them to God and remember them before him now.

Lord, in your mercy,
Hear our prayer.

We pray for those of us who are at home. unable to help. And we pray that you will remind all of us that you love us all equally, that you care for the lonely and the isolated. We pray that we may be able to help and support all those in our town who are struggling, that they may not feel alone.

We're also aware of those who died recently and those who are ill.

So let's continue to ask for healing for all those we know who are ill in mind or body or spirit. Give us the grace to see a need, and to help where we can.

So we spend a moment or two lifting our own prayers to God. If you filled in the hearts exercise, then give to God the things that you need healing. Remember to before him those people in our community who recently lost loved ones, so we think about Iris and Barbara and Bert's family. So let us pray for a moment in silence for all these things.

Finally, we remember again what the psalmist says, "Rejoice in the Lord, you who are righteous and praise His holy name."

Amen.

Before I pray a blessing on all of us, I want to say if anybody has been touched by any of this, then can you email our administrator. You'll find the email address [admin@stjohn316.co.uk] on the website [www.stjohn316.co.uk], and we

will try and put you in touch with people who will help. Please don't hold back. If you feel that you need, then contact us.

So, I want to pray. And after I've prayed as we end the service, there's going to be a time of quiet and some music playing, so that we can end spending our time with God rather than stopping abruptly. Think about everybody who's been at the service today. Pray for our church community and for ourselves.

This is the Aaronic blessing that will be familiar to lots of people. So you may want to say it with me, as we lead into this time.

May the Lord bless us and keep us. May the Lord make his face shine upon us and be gracious to us. May the Lord lift up his countenance upon us and give us his peace.

Amen.

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Words of "Turn Your Eyes":

Original words (verse 1) and music by Helen H. Lemmel.

Additional words (verses 2 to 4) by George Romanace, Nic Trout, Kevin Winebarger and Nathan Stiff.

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Available on <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhXFq4LagxM>