

Healthy living in Christ



One of things we may say at the invitation to communion is this:

*Lord, I am not worthy to receive you,
But only say the word and I shall be healed.*

These beautiful words of humility and faith come from Luke chapter 7 when Jesus comes to Capernaum. A centurion has a slave who is dangerously ill and who asks through intermediaries if Jesus would heal him. When Jesus is on his way, the centurion sends a message saying that he does not need to bother Jesus further by having him come right into the house, Jesus' word is enough. So it proves; the centurion's slave recovers. But what Jesus has to say about this incident is important: "I tell you, not even in the house of Israel have I found such faith". It is right and proper then, that this becomes a statement of our faith before the Eucharist: in the communion we remember the greatness of God and receive the gracious wholeness and healing of Christ.

This passage has much to tell us about health and wellbeing, particularly in a situation where the sick and the sources of healthcare are far apart, as they well may be in remote rural areas. In the first instance, the passage teaches us something about mutual care and concern. The centurion is an important man with people under his command, yet he places a high value on his slave and wants to see him get well. The desire to see healing happen cuts across authority and hierarchy. It also breaks down another barrier, that of belonging to different religious and ethnic groups. The centurion hears about Jesus, but he and Jesus are on different sides of the Roman/Jewish divide. So the centurion sends some Jewish elders to Jesus who stress how the

centurion has helped the Jewish community and provided them with a synagogue. When Jesus responds, friends of the centurion come to him to say that the centurion recognises Jesus' greatness and power and that he does not want to command Jesus' services but obtain only his word and it will be enough. The centurion will not exert his position to make Jesus become his personal physician. He will simply trust him. There is respect, courtesy and faith – a strength of faith that Jesus comments on in astonishment.

We live in a society where health issues are often separated from community issues and from spiritual and faith issues. We may often consume health services as direct impersonal transactions, that leave no space for relationship or an holistic understanding of well being. Yet scripture reminds us of some of the things that can get lost from thinking about what it means to be healthy people. We should look out for one another no matter what artificial barriers and divides get in the way. We should care about the illness of others and search diligently for their healing - not just leave it to someone else to care. We should also respect and honour those in the healing professions and think about their needs, not just our own; doctors and nurses are also part of our communities and need our prayers and support. And of course, we must recover the role of faith in matters of health and wellbeing – to seek to know the life that God intends for us, his promise of healing (whatever that might mean in our lives) and to trust God's love and desire for us no matter what happens to us. A community of faith, living in obedience to and in the love of God, is a model of healthy living indeed. ■

*Anne Richards
Mission Theology Adviser for the Church of England*