

nation's lifestyle or a religious community that will create an environment which promotes better health.

It was not Jesus' ministry to individuals that brought him to the cross; it was his ministry to society and organised religion as a whole. And when he hung on the cross the people he had annoyed and unsettled taunted him, saying "*you saved everybody else. You healed their pain. Why cannot you help yourself?*"

But quick-fix solutions never had been part of Jesus' essential ministry. He bore the weight of pain and degradation; hatred and betrayal; fear and isolation; carried it right through death so that, in the light of his resurrection victory, health and peace, love and community, justice and joy might stand a chance of being reborn.

As Mark- the writer of our Gospel- lived and ministered in the newly-created Christian church, he saw the painful struggles worked through in that community with regard to racial and religious discrimination; crushing anxiety over religious doctrines and obligations; confusion over social duty, especially with regard to the political powers currently in Government; complex family structures; business dealings- there was always some issue to be discussed and sorted. Nothing could simply be left the way it always had been and it was all very tiring, not to mention tedious at times. But Mark also saw a healthier environment being created, as faith in Jesus Christ lifted guilt from people's shoulders; as the living experience of Jesus Christ gave them hope and direction in life; as the humility of Jesus Christ kept them humble and gentle in their dealings with each other; as the passion of Jesus Christ for the world inspired them to break down barriers of hatred and suspicion and welcome the strangers and foreigners in.

There were in the early church "healers" who had inherited Jesus' amazing power to cure disease and there are still healers today. But there were also "creators of health" who had inherited Jesus' mission to bring into existence a kingdom of God in which freedom, happiness and love could enable human minds and hearts, souls and bodies to grow strong and overcome disease and this is a ministry to which we are all called today.

Did Mark see his Gospel the story of a "healer?" As usual: "Yes" and "No."

Let me finish with a little anecdote from Adrian Plass, a modern-day Christian, who writes very honestly of his own struggles with faith and ministry. Adrian was thrilled at the thought of being a "healer." He had these fantasies of walking through crowds of sick, ailing men and women, bestowing a gracious touch of his hand and they would rise up and walk, praising God and acclaiming him. But he could not do it. He could not heal the sick. And this bothered him. Why did he not have a healing ministry-he raged at his wife? Did God not think him good enough?

The phone rang before his wife could answer. It was a lady he had never met telling him of her elderly father, who had just died in hospital. He had been very ill for some weeks and knew that death was near. He had become frightened, very frightened. She had taken him Adrian's last book to read, hoping it might bring him some comfort. And it did, in a way. Apparently it made the old man laugh so much that he stopped being frightened. In fact he literally died laughing. *I just wanted to thank you for that*, she said. Adrian put the phone down and told his wife. She looked him straight in the eye: *And you just said that you did not have a healing ministry.....*

What was Christ's healing ministry really all about? Think on that and you may also discern your own place in that same ministry. Amen.

