

GOSPEL WONDERS

A different way to look at the gospels

The Paralysed Man (suggested) Order of Service

1. Hymn 505 – O Worship the Lord in the Beauty of Holiness.
2. Opening prayers and Lord's Prayer
3. Introduction
4. Hymn 393 – Jesus Hands were Kind Hands
5. Eli's (Sarah's) Story
6. Hymn 723 – All Things are Possible
7. Jacob's Story
8. Salome's Story
9. Hymn 215 – Amazing Grace
10. Prayers of intercession
11. Conclusion
12. Hymn 251 – All for Jesus
13. Blessing

(all hymns from Singing the Faith)

Opening prayers

Lord Jesus you are the source of all that is good and all that is loving. Accept we pray our thanks for all the blessings you shower on us. The brightness of the day the mysterious depths of night. The wonders of the natural world that surrounds us. It shows that this is not just an accident or freak occurrence but comes from the guiding hand of a great creator.

We are also blessed in those around us. Friends and family. Those who inspire us those we can confide in. All which makes life special for us.

In the middle of all of this you placed us and you loved us. So much so that you demonstrated this love in the life of Jesu. One who could see into the human heart and heal its pain and the things that destroyed it. While we may find such love so hard to understand we can accept the gifts it brings and give you thanks in our worship and praise and in our owns small way offer our love to you.

This we do even though we are always aware of the many ways in which we fail you. We forget about you when the opportunity to tell others occurs. We can miss or ignore you when you call us to some opportunity. We can hurt others with an ill-considered word.

Just so many ways we can let you down. But we are saved through Jesus and His promise that a fault, recognised and taken to him with a sincere apology will be taken by him to the Father seeking and being granted forgiveness.

We need time to think about that. Anyone who has anything to take to him this morning. Now is the opportunity. Let's have a little quiet time to think about that.

We have his promise. Through his life, death and resurrection, we know that our sins are forgiven.

LORDS PRAYER.

Introduction

Words in red should be used if the story is to be told by Sarah rather than Eli.

It has been said that young men have visions and old men have dreams. That was certainly the case of old Eli. On a warm day he was to be found sitting in the doorway of his granddaughter's house hearing the sounds of the street. His eyes clouded, with the grey curtains that blocked out vision, turned upward and his head cocked slightly to one side listening to the sounds of life. Occasionally someone would call out a greeting but for the most part he would sit in silence. He heard the women chatting as they went to the market, the young boys on their way to their lessons at the synagogue. The scrape of the crippled beggar dragging himself on his wooden sledge to his place near the well. With these sounds came memories brought forward, sometimes with pleasure sometimes with pain

Today it was the crippled man who brought with him the memory from many years before. A persistent one this, one that even now wouldn't leave him.

A small incident, over in a few minutes yet it stayed with him. So much had happened since, yet that brief time remained in his memory.

He was one of the few who had been there who could remember what exactly had happened. Since that time the land of Israel had suffered much. The Temple destroyed, the streets of Jerusalem red with blood; the soldiers running riot through a city that held out against them, determined to make everyone who had rejected them suffer. As a young man he had seen what had happened at the siege of Masada where all the patriots had died at their own hands rather than surrender to be slaughtered or become slaves to Rome. There had been many crosses around the countryside then. The land and the people had suffered. The dreams of the Messiah had been ground into the earth under the Roman heel. The land was desolate. So why had this one act stayed so clearly with him. Was it a good pure act, which, of its very nature remained in his mind as something good in a world of evil?

He did not know. Maybe now it was just an old man's story. After all this time. He was only a lad. No older than his grandson. He had not reached his Bar mitzvah when it happened.

He had told the story so many times that friends and family looked with resignation when he started to tell it yet again and it was only out of respect for his age that they listened quietly. Sometimes though there was somebody new.

What was it the young man said? He was writing a book on the Rabbis life and somebody had mentioned his name.

They sat (**The three of them. They had been joined by Sarah, his younger sister, who had been there on that day**) out in the shade sampling the new crop of figs and checking out the sweet wine. It was nice for a change to have an interested and appreciative listener. The familiar picture came into his mind as once again he heard

the story repeated. He smiled to himself because, though he started to tell the tale, Sarah kept butting in so in the end he sat back and just listened.

Eli's (Sarah's) Story

That year had been a good one for Galilee, at least as far as the farmers were concerned, and there was all that excitement about Jesus. I'm not sure what he was but some people were saying He was the Messiah. Me? Well, he was OK to me and my friends but, to be honest I couldn't understand half the things he was saying. It was all adult stuff you know.

Anyway, that wasn't what this young man wanted to know. He kept asking what had happened that day.

Well! I told him how the two of us, me and my young sister (me and my brother) came home to find a crowd around and inside the house. We were trying to find a way in, because we were hungry, when we saw Jacob, the paralysed man being dragged up the staircase to the roof by his brothers and those other two chaps who spent a lot of time with him. Then they got to the roof and began to tear it off. There was a lot of shouting from inside but I could hear Isaac shouting that they would make it right later,

We sneaked up the stairs but all we could see was four bottoms sticking in the air because four heads were stuck down a hole in the middle of the roof. It was the funniest thing I ever saw.

Anyway, we crept up behind them and made it six bottoms as we looked down to see what was happening. Which, in fact wasn't much.

Jesus was talking to Jacob who was lying on his mat and a few rabbis were sitting there with faces like thunder muttering to each other. Then Jacob got up, yes, he just stood up, rolled up his mat and walked out. There were gasps of amazement round the room and as soon as he got through the door it seemed as though everyone started speaking at once. I don't think anybody had seen anything like it before

What did I think about it all? Well, when we children talked about it afterwards, I remember saying that I thought the best bit was when they made a hole in the roof.

Jacob's Story

The Rabbi's tell us that sickness is because of some sin but I didn't know what I had done to deserve this. Can't even think of anything my father did. My dad was an honest man who never hurt anyone, always paid his dues to the synagogue so what sin brought this on I just don't know but there I was. Helpless if it wasn't for the family I'd be on the street, begging.

I could never understand why I was struck down in this way. I mean it was an accident. One day I twisted badly. I felt my neck go, then down I went like a sack of olives. There I was, couldn't move.

That's right I was in a bad way. When it happened, we thought it would sort itself out in a few days. But no. I tell you that sometimes I lay awake at night worrying. It wasn't getting better in fact it was getting worse. My muscles began to seize up and my legs twisted so that even with help I couldn't stand upright. I began to despair. You know, in my head I lost all hope. It was a disaster and there was nothing I could do about it. I prayed every day to Adonai but I don't think he listened. To turn from being fit and active one day to a lump unable to do anything for myself. To be moved if and when somebody decided to move me and then left where they thought I should be. It was impossible and there was nothing I could do about it.

Then one day Ephraim, my brother, came bounding into the house with three of our friends, plonked me on sleeping mat and started to take me outside. I yelled at them tell me what they were doing but Isaac just shouted that the new Rabbi was in town and they were taking me to see Him. Well, you can imagine how I felt. I was terrified. I hadn't been out of the house since the accident then I was bouncing around on my mat as they ran down the road. I couldn't even hold on. Any minute now I thought they are going to drop me, here in the middle of the road and then where would I be. I felt bad enough as it was without being put on public display.

Those dear, loveable louts. Right down the main street and then when we arrived there was such a crowd that we couldn't get in. I should have known that this would not have stopped Ephraim, the big dumb ox. All right, he says. Plan B. If we can't go through the door let's try the roof, and before I could say anything I am being banged and bumped up the outside stairs. I think I must have hit every one of them so it is probably fortunate that I couldn't feel anything.

The next thing there is plaster and straw flying all over me, and then I was swinging around on the end of a rope to land at the feet of the Rabbi. Can you imagine what that was like? I was scared and felt such a fool. The worst thing there was nothing I could do but just lie there. Looking up I saw that He had a smile on His face as he looked down on this bundle that had just landed at His feet. I also got the distinct sensation that there were some in the room who did not appreciate my impromptu arrival. There was a distinctly frosty atmosphere.

That didn't seem to worry Jesus though. He just told me that my sins had been forgiven. At that there was a sharp intake of breath and I admit that I couldn't understand that it somehow went against the teaching that a man could not forgive sin. I just wanted to be away and back to the safety of home. I think He must have sensed how I felt because He said

“Look just pick up you mat and go.”

I obeyed the last order and went. I was half way down the road before I realised that I was walking. My legs were straight and strong. I remember shouting at the top of my voice and breaking into a run of sheer elation. I never claimed to understand what happened that day but I had my life back. It was like coming back from the dead.

Mind you I began to feel all those steps I had bounced off. I was black and blue.

Salome's Story

Yes! There was a lot of anger in that room I can tell you. Being a woman, I was pushed right to the back when this crowd came in.

I was visiting my friend Rebecca when it happened. We were just sitting watching the children when the door was pushed open and it seemed as though the whole village were trying to get into the room. We gathered up the children and retreated into a corner. Nobody seemed to be bothered about carrying out the usual welcoming routine, you know the kiss of welcome and the foot washing bit, so we were able to keep out of the way and watch and listen.

Well! It meant little to us. Jesus sat in the middle of the crowd trying to do something for all the people who were crowded around him and at the same time trying to answer the questions that the 'high and the mighty' were asking. It was bedlam. I don't know how He managed to keep His temper, but what struck me was that while all this was going on, around Him was this space of absolute calm.

Then the plaster started falling in. Well Rebecca's first reaction was anger. After all this was her house that was being destroyed, her husband wasn't too pleased either. The cheerful voice shouting that it would be fixed later didn't help either.

Then Jesus said something that caused a bit of a stir among the clever ones and even the not so clever ones went a bit quiet. Jesus looked around sort of, as though He hoped they would see what He hoped that what He said made sense. But no. Whatever the point he was trying to make went right over their heads. For a moment He looked sad, then he bent down and spoke to the man on the mat in front of Him and sat up, sitting quietly waiting. There was a pause and the room went quiet, then, this man who we all knew couldn't move, did. He stood up, rolled up his mat and walked out; people drew aside, almost in fear and let him go.

The room exploded with sound as everybody started talking at once. You should have seen the faces of the Pharisees. If they weren't bewildered, they were furious. They couldn't make head or tails of what had happened.

When we talked about it later my husband told me that it was all about what they believed. That is that sin was the cause of sickness then only Adonai could forgive sin and thus make the sick well. But before their eyes Jesus had made a very sick man well. That was going to take a bit of time for them to get their heads round.

Mind you Rebecca was pleased with her new ceiling. There had been a nasty crack which was now fixed.

Prayers of intercession

Now we come to the time in our service when we can bring to our Heavenly Father the concerns we have for the world, its situations and its people. Let us pray.

Firstly, Lord we look at your church throughout the world. We give thanks for all those places where it grows, where there are a regular stream of people turning to you and acknowledging you as their Lord. For such places we give you thanks and pray for their members and leaders. We ask that you will continue to support them and guide them as you would wish them to go

We do however have to accept that this is not always the case. There are places where the church appears to be shrinking and others where persecution takes place against your beloved people. In such places we pray that you will send encouragement and strength so that they do not feel isolated and intimidated. We also pray for those who lead acknowledging that they can have difficult decisions to make and sometimes have to do this in very difficult times. Help them to learn and understand fully your message and make their decisions in the light of your truth.

When we look at the broader picture, we do have to accept that it is a mass of contradictions. So much good, so much love and care but at the same time so much greed, so much violence, so much lack of consideration for the sensibilities and welfare of others and for the natural world. We see and hear of things that affect us deeply. So, for the good we pray that you will continue to give support and strengthen those involved. We trust in you to help and support them

Final lord we pray for those people and situations which are personally known to us. Who are sick in body or mind. Those who are finding life difficult to cope with at the moment. We bring them to you now asking that you will rest your love on them and bring them your comfort and peace.

We give you thanks for all those who, over the years, have brought your word to us and pray that one day we may join with them in the joys of your heavenly kingdom.

Amen

Conclusion

On the face of it we have a remarkable story. A man without a lot to live for is suddenly reborn and given a new lease of life.

While, for us, this is rather wonderful happening, a life returned, and a demonstration of Jesus power. To a first century Jewish audience it meant so much more and to get the full import we need to understand that.

This way of thinking made a link between sickness and sin. The one being a punishment for the other. There were various views about what was considered sin, the most extreme being that simply being outside the religious establishment, one of the 'Common People' and therefore not complying with its rights and rituals, made them sinners without having to actually do anything.

We have seen Jesus approaching this subject in a number of different ways but in this case, he was approaching the question of sin 'head on' There He is, as so often happens, surrounded by a crowd and also, as so often happens, in that crowd there are a number of people there to check Jesus out. They have heard of Him and want to know what He is about. Probably hoping that He will give them some ammunition to use against Him. He doesn't let them down.

We can sense the feelings in the room as this important time with the Rabbi was interrupted by Jacob's arrival. Anger at the damage and the interruption. Confusion at what was happening and curiosity at what was going to happen. What was Jesus going to do? In His first words Jesus drew all those feelings, all the anger and confusion away from the man on the floor and on to himself.

"Your sins are forgiven"

As only God could forgive sins what was Jesus saying. That He was God, but that was blasphemy. That everything they had been taught about illness being the result of sin was wrong. The tension in that room would have crackled. Yet again Jesus appeared have played into the hands of His enemy's. Then, calm in the centre of all this tension Jesus said I'll show you that I have this authority. Turning to the man lying there, probably feeling like a rabbit caught in the headlights and wishing he was somewhere else, He said

"Get up and go home"

Then much to everybody's surprise he did just that. For a short while all you could hear in that room would be the sound of jaws dropping. Then, more than likely, uproar.

While it is true that you cannot see a sin forgiven in the same way that you can see a crippled man stand the impact on the watchers would have been the same

Our man today had been brought up in the tradition that his condition was the result of sin and though he found it difficult to identify what sin had been committed by him

or a family member he would feel himself to be a sinner first and disabled second. So, when Jesus spoke His words it is quite possible that they touched a nerve somewhere. While others were shouting, he lay there with feelings that he could not describe.

What was it that Jesus saw in the man in front of Him? We will never know but remember the message about the deep and never-ending love of God for all of creation. It would seem that what Jesus saw was a sinner who needed to be forgiven before he could be healed.

What feelings does that bring to us?

Blessing

God to Enfold You.

Christ to Uphold You

Spirit to keep You in Heavens sight

So may God grace You.

Heal and embrace you,

Lead you through darkness

Into the light.

Anonymous Celtic Prayer