



RELEASE: THE HEALING REVOLUTION CONTINUES

Last month I attended a 3-day conference at Colston Hall organised by the LoveBristol Community, a cross-church initiative committed to the regeneration of Bristol City. The conference bore the title '*RELEASE: THE HEALING REVOLUTION CONTINUES*' and feeling that I had not yet witnessed the beginnings of a healing revolution, let alone a continuing one, I decided to go.

In truth, over the past twelve months or so the word 'healing' has been more likely to produce in me feelings of disappointment rather than expectancy. As a church, we have lost three friends in recent months – Pat, Ivan and Dee – for whom we prayed many times, believing in God's power to heal yet failing to see the miracles we longed for. Many of us live daily with physical pain or disability. Some of us suffer from chronic and debilitating conditions; still more battle with feelings of depression and anxiety which threaten to overwhelm us and which we find too shameful to express to others. Although we see wonderful answers to prayer from time to time (thank God for Ed Stuart's restoration!) which of us can honestly say we do not long for much, much more?

So, recognising a need to have my flickering faith rekindled, I signed up for three days in the company of Mark Stibbe, Bill Johnson, Tyler Johnson (who led sessions on raising the dead.....yes, really!) and Shane Claiborne. Each day included extended periods of worship, teaching by Mark Stibbe or Bill Johnson, 'Breakout' seminars and opportunities for prayer ministry. I won't attempt to summarise almost thirty hours of conference content in the small space available here, but here are some of my highlights.

Dave Mitchell's Breakout session dealt with the joys and sorrows of prayer for healing in the context of the local church. Dave (pastor at Woodlands Church and known to some of us at TBC) explored a number of questions people ask in relation to healing: *If God can heal a cold, why not a cancer? How important is a person's faith in determining whether they are healed? Do all*

*Christians possess the gift of healing? Dave emphasised the need for compassion and sensitivity, and encouraged us to see healing as a mystery which we will never fully understand but with which we must engage. He also drew a rough but helpful distinction between *healing* and *miracles*: some conditions, if left, would probably improve on their own over time – e.g. a headache, fever or some infections. When these are made better by prayer for healing, it is as though God has 'sped up' a process which would have happened eventually, albeit slowly – this is *healing*. Other conditions, however, always deteriorate over time – arthritis, cancer and other degenerative illnesses. When these conditions are healed in response to prayer, the normal progress of a disease is reversed and the healing can rightly be called a *miracle*.*

God will do big things in small places, displaying his glory in the desert

Shane Claiborne's session was funny, challenging and very moving. Claiborne is a founding partner of The Simple Way, a faith community in inner city Philadelphia which embraces a radical form of discipleship called *new monasticism*. His session emphasised *healing through living in community*, a community modelled first by Jesus and his disciples and then by the early church (Acts 2 and 4). As the session concluded, Shane Claiborne emptied a large bag of £1 coins on the floor in front of the stage and invited people to take a coin as an expression of their desire to live lives of radical generosity. As the musicians played, delegates filed one by one down the aisles, stooping to take a coin before returning to their seats. During this time the room seemed pregnant with the presence of the Holy Spirit.

Mark Stibbe spoke of a vision God gave him of a world map with lights appearing across the whole globe. This time, he told us, revival will not be limited to one or two special places (Toronto, Florida) where Christians flock for an experience of God. Drawing on a passage from Isaiah 35 he declared that God will 'do big things in small places,' displaying his glory in the desert - the hard, dry and unpromising places which have previously been resistant to renewal and change.

JULY

Saturday 3
1.00pm Fit to Live large screen event!

Sunday 4
11.00am Community service & meal, Dave Staley
6.30pm David Lawrence

Monday 5
10.30am Senior's service

Thursday 8
8.00pm Family forum

Saturday 10
8.00am Men's breakfast

Sunday 11
9.15/11.00am Ken Payne, Don't you get it yet?
6.30pm John Moseley

Monday 12
Inside Out, Picnic at the Forest of Dean Heritage centre

Tuesday 15
8.00pm Youth and children's team meeting

Thursday 15
8.00pm Prayer Evening

Sunday 18
9.15/11.00am Mary Groves, Seeing everything clearly
6.30pm Terry Wicks

Sunday 25
10.00am Start of summer service programme
Lis Pearce, A new beginning
6.30pm Neil Mobbs

August

Sunday 1
10.00am All age service, God can change us
6.30pm Sally Heath

Sunday 8
10.00am Lis Pearce, When the going gets tough
6.30pm Terry Wicks

Monday 9
2.30pm Inside out

Tuesday 10 to Thursday 12
Holiday at Home, United Reformed Church

Saturday 14
8.00am Men's breakfast

Sunday 15
10.00am All age service, Prayer changes things
6.30pm Ed Stuart

Sunday 22
10.00am Lis Pearce, Changed lifestyle
6.30pm David Finney

Sunday 29
10.00am All age service, Changed priorities
6.30pm Stuart Dallison

September

Sunday 5
11.00am Community service and picnic
6.30pm Sally Heath

Friday 10 to Sunday 12
Men's walking weekend

Saturday 11
8.00am Men's breakfast

Sunday 12
9.15/11.00am Paul Ferguson, Who do you say I am?
6.30pm Neil Mobbs

Monday 13
Inside out, games and tea at the Mawson's

Sunday 19
9.15/11.00am Mary Groves, Cross-shaped lives
6.30pm David Ling

Monday 20
7.00pm Start of Alpha course

Sunday 26
9.15/11.00am Nigel Coles
6.30pm Malaysia feedback

Mark Stibbe called on Christian leaders to persevere and not give up, particularly those who have become weary and discouraged: *Aslan is on the move!* During the ministry time that followed it seemed as if a huge wave of God's power had been released in the room as the Spirit ministered to people where they stood.

I came away from Colston Hall on the final evening very tired and very encouraged. I had witnessed the power of God at work and had experienced an amazing - and entirely unexpected - healing myself (but that's another story!) Whatever disappointments we have faced or will face in relation to healing, we can be sure of this: *God is 'able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us. To him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen'*

Lis

Nicaragua visit - March 2010

The TBC team (David & Heather Staley, Mike Britten and Josiah Verlaque) visited Nicaragua with others from the charity, 'SIFT' (Seed International Funding Trust), to build 25 latrines for needy villagers of 'Las Pilas' who were without adequate facilities. They were wanted by the doctor sponsored by the charity, Dr Sandra Villagra, as being vital to improving public health locally. After two weeks there, the team flew to the Atlantic coast township of Bluefields to work in its slums.

Las Pilas, which has around 125 families averaging 7 to 8 people each, is on the Island of Ometepe in Lake Nicaragua. The lake is the second largest body of fresh water in the southern Americas and the island has a population of around 30,000 people. It consists of two conjoined volcanoes, Maderas to the south (dormant for a century) and Concepcion to the north (sporadically active and which erupted whilst the team were there), with the village lying between them. Most villagers are extremely poor, with around half the families living at the poverty level of \$2 a day.

Six local builders were employed particularly for digging and concreting the latrine pits and doing the final assembly of the 'casitas' building over each latrine. Daytime temperatures were always in the high 90's F, with similar humidity. The local builders coped with this and worked tremendously hard. All the latrines were finished before



the team returned home and the village community showed their gratitude by providing a celebration meal from their scant resources.

A few days into our work we noticed the volcano above us starting to erupt. All work stopped while we worked out whether this was going to be a problem or not... However, none of the villagers or workmen seemed to be concerned so we all got back to work. This happened eight or nine times over the next two weeks. The army was said by the local newspaper to be planning to evacuate part of the island if things got worse, but it all petered out just after the team left.

We then drove to Matagalpa in the northern mountains and the heart of the coffee growing region, for a weekend relaxing on a coffee plantation before flying to the east coast township of Bluefield. Here, in the slum area near the town's rubbish dump, are people living in houses of poles and corrugated steel sheets (mostly very rusty). Notwithstanding their hard living conditions, children were sent immaculate to school each day and we were received everywhere with smiles and friendship. We worked with the help of one local builder on five of the houses to prevent collapse by replacing roofing and timber structures eaten away by termites.

Whilst the men worked on the buildings, Heather Staley worked magnificently with the local children to form memorable friendships. Children who before had remained quietly around their houses she encouraged with games and home-made kites to run up and down the empty street and have fun together.

The four weeks passed quickly and, having passed through the airport of the capital Managua for the last time, we returned to England, via Houston (Texas), the hub airport for our carrier

'Continental'. We took one last look at the blue skies that we had enjoyed for the past month from high over the Atlantic before descending through the clouds to Heathrow and the welcome of English rain...

Mike Britten

Seniors mini-service

The church has been asked to host a MINI-SERVICE for folk in residential homes who don't normally get to a church service. There have been two meetings so far, both of which we feel have been worthwhile with numbers of ten to twelve. The feedback has been positive and we will continue, but we are praying that the elderly



from homes around the area will be encouraged to come along for coffee and biscuits, followed by a couple of well known hymns and a very short word encouraging a decision for Jesus. Many old folk have never made such a decision. All prayers will be greatly appreciated.
Marcel and Suzete Wadman

Outside/In prison visiting

Brenda, Naomi and Shelagh began prison visiting when Karen, a Gloucestershire lady, who has been leading studies at the women's prison met us at the gate. Once inside the chapel we immediately felt the sense of peace that prevails there, a contrast with the noisy activity elsewhere. Fired with enthusiasm, we quickly agreed to take turns supporting Karen as she led the group. Some time later Mair joined us.

Each visit is different, and we go in not knowing who or how many will be there or what is going to happen. We have been aware of God's presence there with us in a very real way.

Initially we were there in a supportive role but when Karen became ill we found ourselves responsible for taking the Monday sessions and so we currently go in teams of two, with one of us leading the Bible study. Our aim is to point the ladies to Jesus and the love that he has for them encouraging them to put their lives on a new foundation with Him where there is forgiveness, healing and hope for the future. We try to convey God's compassion for them and have found it essential to pray together before each session and ask the Lord to empower us and fill us with His love.

Each session starts with a time of worship. The ladies choose their favourite hymns which often results in some outstanding singing (and occasionally a struggle) but is always meaningful and leads onto the Bible study session. We have found it amazing how God puts a word in our hearts and then confirms it as we prepare. This has been such a blessing to us because as God meets our needs we realise the need to go in His strength.

At the end of the study we endeavour to have a time of prayer. Recently we have found this to be a valuable time as this provides the opportunity for opening up and sharing needs and worries. We have also encouraged prayers of thanks and praise and although we will pray for individual needs, a great delight has been to see how some of the ladies wish to join in and pray for one another. Our time together ends with tea or coffee and this too is an important time since not only can we talk to individuals about their needs, but the ladies have the opportunity to have

fellowship with each other.

Those who choose to come to the Bible study are just a small fraction of the women in the prison. Many are there for a very short time and we may only see them once; others we get to know a little better. It has been wonderful to see how some of them have developed in their faith and especially in their love, compassion and support for each other. Many times we learn how God is meeting with them back "on the wing" and has used them to witness to other ladies in the prison.

We meet ladies who have come from many different countries and situations. Some who have never heard about God's love and others who, because of what they have done, have gone away from the Lord and are finding a way back to Him. We never ask why they are in prison, although some do choose to tell us. For all of them it is a time to stop and reconsider their life and where it is going.

Certainly we have seen the Power and Love of God at work as some of the ladies have grown in their faith and we believe lives have been changed. "Coming to the Bible Study makes me feel clean inside and warm all over" were words of a nineteen year old prisoner following a recent Bible study. A very agitated prisoner attending a Bible study arrived in the chapel and made it clear that she didn't want to take part in any way; even taking her chair outside! However, the Holy Spirit had other plans for her life and by the

His presence is there before we arrive ... We have seen the power and love of God at work

end of the session her behaviour had changed completely and she was really keen to know what she had to do to have God in her life. One lovely girl who we watched develop in her faith is now back home in Africa and goes into a local prison listening and helping people.

There are many examples of how the Lord is moving in this "place of correction" and rehabilitation. His presence is there before we arrive and we thank Him for his great faithfulness. We are grateful to Judith the chaplain who, together with the chaplaincy staff, has supported us. We are also grateful for the help of other ladies in our church. Thank you to all who have prayed, and continue to pray for us. God is at work doing only what God can do: convicting, healing, restoring, forgiving, loving, encouraging, guiding and drawing people to Himself - opening eyes to Jesus Christ.

Jesus said "Go in my name and because you believe others will know that I live"

Brenda, Mair, Naomi & Shelagh (The team of chaplaincy volunteers)