

Disability awareness Sunday

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Preacher: Malcolm Hazell

[0 : 00] I know who stands behind, the God of angel armies is always by my side.

The one who reigns forever, he is a friend of mine, the God of angel armies is always by my side. Good morning everyone, and welcome on this sunny Sunday morning, as summer come at last. My name is Judy Pantridge, and I'm deacon here at Union Baptist Church, and I welcome you if you're here in the sanctuary here with us this morning, and I welcome you if you are watching online, live, or even later on.

You are welcome this morning. So today, we have two themes running alongside each other. We are taking today as Disability Awareness Sunday, more about that later.

But today is also the day we remember Jesus' ascension into heaven. Jesus died and rose from death, and he then ascended into heaven.

[1 : 24] He was taken up, body and soul, to rejoin the Father God in heaven. So completing his work of salvation, and guaranteeing eventual glorification for all who love him.

We can read about this in Acts chapter 1. After his suffering, Jesus presented himself to his disciples, and gave many convincing proofs that he was alive.

He appeared to them over a period of forty days, and spoke about the kingdom of God. As they gathered round him, they saw that he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight.

They were looking intently up into the sky as he was going, when suddenly, two men, dressed in white, stood beside them.

Men of Galilee, they said, why do you stand here looking into the sky? This same Jesus, who has been taken from you into heaven, will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven.

[2 : 40] Let's pray. Almighty God, as we prepare to worship you today, we ask that you will stretch our imaginations to sense the majesty and mystery of your ascension.

May the knowledge of Jesus' presence in heaven, our risen and ascended Lord, give us confidence in our praying, and hope for the future.

We thank you, heavenly Father, for sending your son into the world, so that we may be saved. We thank you for the fulfillment of your word, and praise you, because you are faithful to your word, and to your people.

You sent your son to be a forerunner, so that all who believe could also be with you in heaven. So on this day of ascension, we glorify your holy name.

Amen. Amen. Let's stand and sing to the Lord. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation. Amen. Amen. Amen. Praise to the Lord, the Almighty, the King of creation.

[4 : 15] O my soul, praise him, for he is your health and salvation. Come, Lord, you hear, brothers and sisters, draw near.

Praise him in glad adoration. Praise to the Lord, above all things so mightily reigning.

Keeping us safe at his sight and so gently sustaining. Have you not seen all you have needed as we met by his gracious ordaining?

Praise to the Lord, who shall prosper our work and defend us.

Surely his goodness and mercy shall daily attend us. Ponder anew. Ponder anew.

[5 : 38] Ponder anew. What the Almighty can do. Who with his love will befriend us.

Ponder anew. What the Almighty can do. Who with his love will befriend us. Let all that is in me adore him.

All that has died the bread come out with praises before him. Let the Amen sound from his people again.

Gladly we praise and adore him. I'm going to continue reading some words from the letter to the Philippians.

Romans, in your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus. Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage.

[6 : 51] Rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death, even death on a cross.

Therefore, God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name above every name. That at the name of Jesus, every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth.

And every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. Let's come before him in a prayer of confession.

Forgive us, Lord, when we become rooted to the earth, unable to see beyond the present, blind to the glory of your presence.

We become engrossed in what is happening now and forget all that you have in store for us. We are so concerned with what is immediate, temporary and short-lived that we leave ourselves no time for the things that are eternal and full of your love.

[8 : 16] Let's take a moment of silence now while we confess to God those times when this has been true for us. When we have taken our eyes away from Jesus and become too engrossed in worldly matters.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. So we come to you, Lord, now... lift up our heads that we may see Christ in all his glory and all things in their true perspective.

We ask this with the forgiveness of our sins in your name. Amen. Amen. Let's sing about our wonderful, Lord. In Christ alone my hope is found.

Amen. Amen. Amen. In Christ alone My hope is found He is my light, my strength, my song This forest stone, this solid ground Burned through the fizzes, drought and storm What heights of love, what depths of peace What fears are still, what strivings cease Thy path for love, thy holy hope Here in the love of Christ I stand In Christ alone, who's hurt on flesh

[10 : 27] Fullness of God in helpless pain With guilt of love and righteousness Scored by the ones He came to save Till on that cross, as Jesus died The wrath of God was satisfied For every sin of Him was laid Here in the death of Christ I live For in the ground His body lay Light of the worldwide darkness slain Then first He formed in glorious day

Up from the grave He rose again And as He stands in victory His curse has lost its grip on me For I am His and He is mine Born with the precious blood of Christ There in the death of Christ There in the life of fear in death This is the power of Christ in me The Christ has lost my death The power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me Jesus commands my destiny The power of hell, the scheme of man

Will never bless me Can ever bless me from his hand Can ever bless me from his hand Can ever bless me from his hand Till He returns Till He returns Who calls me home Here in the power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me Here in the power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me From me from his hand Oh Blessed in me The power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me Do not bless me O Spirit in me The power of Christ in me The power of Christ in me God, you raised our Lord Jesus Christ to your right hand on high. As we rejoice in his exaltation, fill us with his spirit, we pray, that we may go into the world and faithfully proclaim the gospel.

This we ask through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you in the unity of the Holy Spirit forever and ever. Amen. Thank you. Please sit down.

Thank you. So it's time for a story. The story of the cracked pot.

[14 : 02] Some say this story comes from India. Others say it comes from China. But wherever it originates, it's a traditional story from long ago. And here it is.

There was once a water bearer whose job it was to carry water from the well in the village to the master's house. For this, the water bearer carried two large clay pots. Each one hung at the end of a large pole, which was carried across the neck.

one of the pots had a crack in it. And while the other pot was perfect and always delivered a full load of water at the end of that long walk from the well to the master's house, the cracked pot only ever arrived half full because the water leaked out. For months, this went on daily, with the water bearer delivering only one and a half pots full of water to the master's house. Of course, the perfect pot was proud of his achievements, perfect to the end for which it was made. But the poor cracked pot was ashamed of its own imperfection and miserable that it was able to accomplish only half of what it had been made to do.

After two years of what it perceived to be a bitter failure, it spoke to the water bearer one day at the well.

I'm ashamed of myself and I want to apologize to you. Why? asked the water bearer. What are you ashamed of? For the past two years, I have only been able to deliver half my load because this crack in my side causes the water to leak out all the way back to your master's house. So you have to do all this work and you don't get full value for your efforts, the pot said. The water bearer felt sorry for the cracked pot and in compassion replied, as we return to the master's house today, I want you to notice the beautiful flowers along the path.

[16:28] Indeed, as they went along the path, the cracked pot made sure it noticed the sun warming the beautiful and wild flowers on the side of the path and it was cheered by the sight. But at the end of the journey, it still felt sad because it had leaked out half its load again and so it apologized again for its failure.

The water bearer said to the pot, did you notice that there were flowers only on your side of the path but not on the other pot's side? That's because I have always known that you had a crack and I took advantage of that. I planted flower seeds on your side of the path and every day, while we walked back from the well, you have been watering them. All this time, I have been able to pick these beautiful flowers to decorate my master's house. Without you being just the way you are, there would have been no flowers to pick, no colour and beauty to grace his house.

So I wonder what we can learn from this story because all good stories have a moral, don't they? I think it's reminding us that each of us is unique. We all have strengths and weaknesses, weaknesses, just like the cracked pot. And it's the cracks, the weaknesses, the flaws that we have, make our lives together interesting and rewarding. We must take each person just as they are and look for the good to discover how we can all be of help and benefit to each other.

Thank you for your lovely listening. Let's pray. Dear Lord, help us to allow you to use our weaknesses and flaws for your good purposes. Thank you that you can use each one of us in our weak states, knowing that your power is made perfect in our weaknesses. Use us each day as you will.

And our prayer for the children and the young people as they leave for their groups. We pray, Lord, that you will lead and inspire the children and young people in their groups this morning. Be with them and their leaders as they learn about you and about your will for them in their lives. Draw close, draw them closer to you and bless them each one, we pray. Amen.

[19:19] I invite the children and the young people and their leaders to go to their groups. So this one is current in jazz, Thank you.

Thank you.

I think because I'm not sure any other church is doing it, but we are unique. An organisation called Through the Roof aims to raise awareness of disability and the barriers faced by disabled people in Christian life.

They do this by empowering churches and equipping them and the Christian community to fully involve disabled people and so provide life-changing opportunities for disabled people.

Through the Roof promotes having a disability awareness Sunday and it encourages churches to become roof breakers.

[21:23] This term coming from the account in Luke 5 about the story about the paralysed man being brought to his friends by Jesus. Here's a little snippet of it.

They went up on the roof and lowered the paralysed man on his mat through the tiles and into the middle of the crowd right in front of Jesus.

So roof breakers aim to enable disabled people to come to Jesus, to be included in church life, to be able to participate in different ways and to belong.

We're going to see a short video from Through the Roof, showing some ways in which this is done, interviewing some roof breakers.

As a disabled person in church can be quite daunting. People always make assumptions about me. [22 : 33] I think I've got to speak different things that I thought my thinking is not great, but it is. I've got to agree.

These challenges may be due to the environment, they may be due to access issues, to the attitudes that we might encounter.

I think my big passion is actually to see people see the disability that they face as an opportunity and as a way of providing a different insight and a different view on the world.

I think if I want to clear up people, I want to be able to carry that care. But now I care. We've all fallen down.

So the roof breakers take their name from the account in Luke 5 when the paralysed man is lifted through the roof to Jesus. And the roof breakers are the people who are enabling that man to get to Jesus and to be in Jesus' presence.

[23 : 44] It's really good to be with Frigga. As it came into play the other day with somebody who will drag me.

They are drags from the back of the time. I thought, oh, this is my job to make you feel welcome. I try not to make you feel welcome. I try not to make you feel welcome. I try not to make it open to the top, but I try to be diswelcome with me.

And if I come back, then I can just do that. Do that, say, and still with us. We call them roof breakers because they're breaking down barriers to help people to come and encounter Jesus and be part of the life of the church.

So when disabled people aren't involved, either within the planning, within their community, churches really miss out on being an all embracing community.

I think the most important thing is about giving people a place to be. And it's like we want to see disabled people as part of that family.

[24 : 56] And so I think the key thing is just to ask and not to assume. We need to have everyone involved and we need to hear from as many different voices with as many different body shapes and ways of being, different abilities, people who may struggle with literacy, all sorts of things.

Because that's the makeup of God's people. And we need everyone to be part of that in order to really set the world on fire with love.

That's what we're about. It's about love. A church without disabled people is an incomplete church. We're all made in the image of God. Made to be in relationship with God and each other. Each of equal value and intimate worth.

So we are different in many ways, as we heard on the video. Male and female, having different talents, strengths, weaknesses, disabled, not disabled, from different ethnic and social backgrounds.

But all these differences are irrelevant compared to our unity in Christ. And this is what we're going to be exploring a little bit more today.

[26 : 28] So I'm going to ask Malcolm to come and join me. We're going to get the stools out. And first he's going to ask me a few questions. And then I'm going to ask him a few questions.

Do you want to move this? Hi everyone. Can I introduce Malcolm?

Right, here we go Judy. Judy said she's never been so scared as a service which isn't all age. So if you can just kind of, just show love.

That would be great. I'd be more comfortable with actions sometimes. Okay, well if you want to answer with actions Judy, feel free. So, first question. How do you see Jesus respond to people he met who had a disability?

Okay, well I think in the Gospels we read accounts of Jesus meeting disabled people. He accepted them. He valued them, loved them as individuals.

[27 : 28] He asked them what they wanted him to do for him. He didn't just presume. And he looked beyond their physical disability to their deeper needs.

Often they didn't even realise themselves as with the man coming through, the paralysed man. And he said, your sins are forgiven. Which was something that was life changing for all present I think.

And our need for the forgiveness of sin. So, how do you think we can support families and children who've got disabilities who perhaps we meet or who become part of this community here?

Well, I think we need to be Jesus to them as much as we can. I think initially parents with a disabled child in the early stages need to know that they're loved, accepted, welcomed into the church

fellowship, loved.

They need to have understanding, especially as they work through what might be a range of emotions, bewilderment, guilt, anger, grief, all sorts.

[28 : 34] And then to continue to show love as their journey continues. And I know, obviously we are all very fond. If you know Joanne, then you'll know that Roger and Judy have a lovely daughter, Joanne.

What's your experience been here at this church? Well, Joanne was born when we were still, we were members here. So, she has always been part of this community. And it has been an absolute blessing for us.

We've always felt loved, welcomed, supported in every way. Sometimes practical ways, but always known that she has been welcomed and accommodated, which has been a little challenging at times.

As people especially know, but we felt very much part of the community. And now that she's an adult, I think in her own right, I think she feels and we feel that she belongs.

And that's a real blessing. And of course, Joanne is Joanne, but just in case you didn't know, she has Down syndrome. Which is obviously, and autism.

[29 : 39] Gosh, I didn't know all the extra bits. So, there we go. How have you seen this evidence in UBC in a broader context than just your own experience? Well, over the years, there have been a number of children with special needs who have been included, still are included in the children's work on Sunday mornings.

They've developed strategies and I know there has been some training for the group leaders to be able to accommodate the children with individual needs. So that they can access whatever is going on.

There's also been a wonderful team of volunteers who have been willing to support children on a one-to-one basis over the years, as that has been necessary.

Our church vision, to see High Wycombe transformed by God through his loving, serving and worshipping church.

I think this is really important. And sometimes, we need to adapt the way we do things in order to welcome people in to this community. And nearly ten years ago now, well it was ten years ago, we felt God, a group of us felt God leading us to set up WOW!

[30 : 53] Wide Open Worship, which aims to provide the opportunity for teenagers and adults with learning disabilities to worship God and to learn more about the love of Jesus.

As this ministry has progressed over the years, it's been blessed by God, we feel, and it's been a joy to witness the relationships that have developed between the members and between the team and the members, between the church and the members, as people have been invited and have been welcomed into church services, to church activities.

And we've also witnessed the deepening understanding of what it means to be a Christian and the development of faith in some of those folks. Which is a joy.

That's it. Excellent. Well done. Tick, should we give Judy a clap? Oh no! You just want to clap at the end of your bit, don't you?

No, no, no, no, no. I just want you to know the love, that was all. Thank you. Thank you. So I just thought, before we turn the tables, that you might like to just have a moment to either think about your own experiences of disability, somebody you know, either in the church setting or in a different setting in your life, maybe talk about it to the people sitting around you, or just take a minute to think about what we've seen and heard so far.

[32 : 24] Thank you. Thank you. That was you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. So, Malcolm's turn now. I'm going to ask him. I'm going to talk about theology.

Challenge him a bit more. Oh, gosh. So, Malcolm, the Bible says that we are made in the image of God in Genesis 127.

How does Jesus identify with those experiencing disability? I think we're all acutely aware that Jesus experienced acute impairment.

[34 : 26] He was damaged and marred more than any man. He was spat at and cursed. So, he knew humiliation, which often people with disabilities can feel humiliated and left out.

I think Jesus identified beautifully and perfectly, really, with those suffering and those who the world rejects and doesn't understand.

So, yeah. So, how do those experiencing disability help us to see how we should live as God intended? Yes.

Yes. I think I find it very humbling. When I see people, I think, oh, I'm not sure they'll be able to do very much. And then they just pour their life out, despite the fact that they struggle.

They've got many, many struggles. And that's an absolutely beautiful thing. And we often want to go around looking like we've got everything sorted out and be strong and able.

[35 : 33] And if you look at what the Bible says, it's quite clear that we are dependent human beings. We're made to be dependent upon God for everything and dependent upon one another as well.

So, I think those with disabilities are almost like a parable for us to look at and to observe and to learn from.

And perhaps to recognize our own weakness and call out to God in our need. And thank the Lord for seeing his power at work, even in weakness.

So, yeah. So, what do you think is God's attitude to disability? Well, God is for us all. He loves his creation for all that he has made.

And as we look at the cross, we see the Lord dealing with sin most acutely. And ultimately, all that diminishes human life.

[36 : 40] So, he comes to help, to heal, to identify with those, all of us who are struggling. God strengthens by the Holy Spirit in our trials, which are many in life, aren't they?

Whatever ability or disability we think we have. And I do find it quite remarkable as we look at the resurrected Jesus. I don't know whether you've ever thought about, you know, I know we don't know exactly what Jesus looks like.

But do you remember Thomas saying, you know, unless I put my hands in the scars on your hands and your feet, and your side, I think might be the side, I'm not going to believe.

And so, the resurrected Jesus comes and stands before Thomas and says, come, you know, stop doubting and believe. Touch me. So, that's quite surprising if you think about it.

The resurrected Jesus has the wounds of the cross. So, I think this shows us just how much God identifies with those with disabilities.

[37 : 45] Remarkable. Thank you. No need to clap. No, I'm not going to ask everybody to clap. You're a professional. Oh, there you go. I'm going to ask Kathy to come and lead our prayers of intercession.

Thank you. Let's pray.

Heavenly Father, creator of heaven and earth, we praise you that you are sovereign and good. We praise you for your love of all people. We praise you that you have made each person in your image.

And yet, this image is distorted by the brokenness of this world. This brokenness we all experience in different ways. And so, today, we pray for those people made in your image who are living with disabilities.

We pray for our children with mental disabilities. We thank you that you hold them close to your heart. Let them grow in wisdom and understanding of you.

[39 : 10] We pray for their salvation. And Lord, please give them peace in their hearts. And we lift up our adults with mental disabilities. Give them joy in the midst of their limitations.

May they find peace and fulfillment in knowing you and discovering your will for their lives. We thank you for the ministry of WOW.

We pray that you would continue to give wisdom to the WOW team. Help them to put your love into action by making the gospel fully and joyfully accessible to the people attending WOW.

We pray for those who have physical disabilities in hearing, in sight, or in limb due to age or other causes.

Lord, please comfort them and save them from bitterness and frustration. Give them joy in the midst of their limitations. We pray that you would grant them endurance and encouragement.

[40 : 13] Let them be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. Lord, please provide for all their needs according to the riches of your glory in Christ Jesus.

And keep them in perfect peace. Father, we pray for all those who are caring for our children and adults who have disabilities. Father, we lift up our parents of children with disabilities.

We ask that you give them strength, courage, knowledge, and love to face and handle the daily challenges and heartbreaks of raising their disabled child.

Help them to show your love in their words and actions. And provide them with the peace that surpasses all understanding that their beautiful child is a child of yours and a gift to them.

Help these parents to instill in their child a knowledge of your love and presence. And Lord, we pray that mothers and fathers would find the support they need.

[41 : 19] And that you would protect and strengthen their marriages. Lord, we pray for carers of adults with disabilities. We pray that you fill them with your strength, peace, love, and perseverance.

And that you would also give them respite. Hold them close. Comfort them in times of stress and frustration. Give them wisdom and compassion to encourage those they care for.

And inspire them with hope through the love their care shows them. Let everything they do for those they care for be to your glory.

Father, we pray for your church. Help us to manifest your love to a watching world as we live in countercultural ways that reflect the values of your kingdom on earth.

Humble us when we fail to look beyond human disability. And lead us to bring honor to all those you have created. We pray that your church would be hospitable to every person who comes through its doors.

[42 : 28] Please equip us with the knowledge and skills to properly support our disabled. And help us to love and care for them so that they feel that they belong.

And Lord, help us to love and support their carers. Father, we so look forward to the fulfillment of your kingdom when Jesus comes again. And you restore your creation to what you meant it to be. We praise you for your promise that there will be no more mourning, crying, pain, or death. And that the disability and brokenness that brings us loss, sorrow, or discomfort in this life will no longer have the power to do so.

We pray all of this in the mighty name of your son, Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. We're going to sing what gift of grace is Jesus, my Redeemer.

Please stand. Amen. What gift of grace is Jesus, my Redeemer?

[44 : 04] Jesus Christ. There is no more for heaven now to give. He is my joy, my righteousness and freedom.

My steadfast love, my deep and boundless peace. To this I hold.

My hope is only Jesus. For my life is only bound to His.

Oh, how strange and divine I can sing. All is mine, but not mine, but through Christ in me.

The night is dark, but I am not forsaken.

[45 : 15] For by my side the Savior, He will stay. I labor on in weakness and rejoicing.

For in my need His power is displayed. To this I hold. My shepherd will defend me.

For the deepest valley He will lead. For the night has been won.

And I shall overcome. Yet not I, but through Christ in me. Many of His known to me.

He will try and forget. For the weight I tread. I know I am forgiven. The future's sure.

[46 : 26] The price it has been paid. For Jesus bled and suffered for my pardon And he was raised to overthrow the grave To this I hold, my sin has been defeated Jesus now and ever is my plea All the chains are released, I can see I am free, yet not I, but through Christ in me With every breath I long to follow

Jesus, for he has said that he will bring me home And day by day I know he will renew me Until I stand with joy before the throne To this I hold, my hope is only Jesus All the glory evermore to hear When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat Yet not I, but through Christ in me When the race is complete, still my lips shall repeat Yet not I, but through Christ in me

Yet not I, but through Christ in me Thank you. Lynn is going to bring our Bible reading Bible reading and then Malcolm is going to come and speak to us About the theology of disability Our reading this morning is from 2 Corinthians 12 Verses 7 to 10 and you can find it on page 1166 in the Pew Bibles Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me But he said to me, my grace is sufficient for you For my power is made perfect in weakness

Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses So that Christ's power may rest on me That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses In insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties For when I am weak, then I am strong May God speak to us through his word Well, I'm going to seek to do a short sermon More teaching focused than preaching focused On this particular passage Which I hope you'll find helpful Let's pray, shall we?

Father, help us to listen to your word Not I, but Christ in me Be heard, I pray Amen Well, Paul tells us in verse 7 That in order to keep him from being conceited He was given a thorn in the flesh And you kind of go, what's that then, Paul?

[50 : 42] What are you going on about? It's not entirely clear what this thorn in the flesh was This disability, this weakness We don't know Some suggest malaria Others, a severe and continuous migraine Others, and probably more likely, eye trouble That caused Paul immense pain But please notice that Paul, as he explains this to us Seems to be deliberately imprecise about exactly what it is In fact, we need to take his focus About how he speaks about it His focus is not in getting a precise diagnosis Which I am completely rubbish at In church life, when somebody explains their medical condition I get it about 50% right He doesn't go into detail like that Do you notice that?

What he focuses upon, instead Is the source of his affliction And the purpose of it It's interesting, isn't it?

I wonder if when you next go to the doctors Or whatever Maybe you ought to say Well, where's this coming from? And what is the purpose of this? Probably the GP won't be able to help you too much But that's what Paul focuses on So who sent the thorn in the flesh That Paul is experiencing?

Well, Paul is extremely clear He doesn't give a detailed medical description But he's very clear That this thorn that he is experiencing Has been sent by Satan himself That sounds surprising, doesn't it?

Don't you think? It's a bit shocking Satan sent this thorn to torment Paul Says the text Paul explains in Ephesians 6 That our battle is not against flesh and blood But against principalities and powers of this dark world And Paul is experiencing something of that in his body Now, it's obvious that Paul has experienced lots of opposition And oppression He's had beatings, shipwrecks, imprisonment Constant buffeting It's kind of like par for the course for Paul He doesn't seem surprised that God has allowed Satan To send this thorn to He doesn't ask the Lord why in this text He may have done privately, but not here He doesn't, however, simply grin and bear it Please notice Let's go on to verse 8 He prays for this thorn to be taken away

[53 : 29] He says, three times I pleaded with the Lord To take it away from me Paul knows that God is sovereign God is powerful And he calls upon the Lord in his need He doesn't give in to passive resignation He calls upon the Lord He calls upon the Lord So let us follow Paul's example And pray for healing For release from oppression Wherever we experience it And offer that prayer to others But do check with them first It's good to follow the advice given in James 5 verse 14 I am completely delighted I'm sure all of our eldership are completely delighted When people follow James 5 verse 14 Let me read it to you Is anyone of you sick?

He should call the elders of the church To pray over him To anoint him with oil In the name of the Lord And the prayer offered in faith Will make the sick person well The Lord will raise him up Over the years of my ministry here I have had a number A good number of phone calls Asking for exactly this And it is always a joy In my experience as we have prayed We always experience the grace of the Lord Jesus The love of God The unity that comes in being together in fellowship We often have experienced extra resources Some improvement And we delight in that And give God the glory And occasionally we have seen healing I was sharing about this need for persistence in prayer And Paul says three times But some think it was a persistent pressing into the Lord That he was looking for And I was chatting to our sister Rachel just here Rachel, do you want to just wave a little bit?

Because I'm about to say something about Rachel And if you want to get the correct version Go and chat to her over coffee and tea Rachel struggled very badly With very severe depression In her teenage years and her twenties She asked for God to heal her many, many times And it seemed that he was not going to heal her The depression continued She wondered whether And this is the reason for mentioning it She wondered whether This was her thorn in the flesh I wonder if you've wondered about that for you She had no faith on one particular reason It kind of went on about ten years Just struggling Thankfully She had a wonderful Christian counsellor She had helpful input From a psychiatrist And that helped And really gave her the grace To continue on Which we give thanks to God for Eventually About ten years after all this She went Her friend of hers said Oh I've

seen that we can go to this meeting And they're offering prayer for Christian healing And Rachel was like Oh no Not again But this friend had been very dear to her So she thought Well I better go along And at that meeting Everybody got prayed for But Rachel was sitting there Like I'm not going to be prayed for I've done this I've got the t-shirt I'm looking after my thorn in the flesh You know And in the end She thought Oh stuff it I'm just going to go for it It wasn't like an act of faith I don't think Rachel was it It was like Oh let's get this over and done with And as a couple of people prayed for her She had a vision Of waves that were crashing

Just going still And from that day Her depression lifted And it has not come back Shall we give God the glory for that It's just amazing Now it's hard Telling a story like this Because some of you Will be sitting there Saying Oh I wish that were me And for some That will come That healing And for others It will be a struggle And I don't have an answer And I don't think Paul Gives us an answer But he does give us What we need So When Paul Asked the Lord To heal him What Answer did Paul get Have a look at verse 9 But he said to me Well I'm going to read the bit That he said to you But basically the answer was no

[58 : 28] That was the basic answer And it says My grace is sufficient for you For my power Is made perfect In weakness Now Paul's critics Thought that his thorn in the flesh Was a sign That he was no apostle at all And they cited his weakness To discredit him Paul says You've got it wrong Paul knew Because the Lord had told him That his affliction Would lead him To humble dependence So that God's work In Paul's life Would become Even more evident And visible So what does God's grace And power Look like When we are weak Or disabled What does it look like As you look at brothers and sisters That you know Are experiencing Ongoing difficulties What does

This beautiful verse This promise My grace is sufficient for you For my power Is made perfect In weakness Well I want to Give you Another visual aid And again For both these people I have checked with them That it's okay To share this with you Our dear sister Elizabeth Do you want to just Wave to us Elizabeth Has Suffered An affliction Of a tumour In her Head And she's had An operation And that has helped But it still means That she can't She can see with one eye And hear with one ear Is that right Elizabeth?

Yes Yes As I have spent time With Elizabeth We've prayed But we haven't seen Breakthrough Although we have seen Relief from that operation Haven't we?

That was good But I want to tell you The grace That I see And the power That I see At work In her life When she had Some bad news The other week Elizabeth was down To do the reading And I thought Oh it would be Too much to ask her To do that After that news So I said to Elizabeth You know Really We can get somebody else To do the reading She said no I want to read The word of God It's a small thing But to me As a pastor That was a big thing In addition I think Was it last week Where we said That we needed people To sign the children in At reception Is it last week?

At the members meeting That's right At the church members meeting Some of you won't be there Do you know Who volunteered To sign the children in With one eye And one ear Elizabeth did Does that touch your heart?

[61 : 20] Does that speak to you? Of the grace Of God And the power Of God At work In this woman of God It does to me And I am humbled And challenged I hope you are Too Now don't stop her From doing it But do pile in To volunteer Paul Is saying That God's grace Is poured in Not in spite Of the thorn But Because of it If you've got a struggle A difficulty An ongoing situation God's grace Is to be poured in Ask for prayer But God's grace Is to be poured in To that situation Paul is experiencing God's power In a way He never would have done Without walking This pathway Paul is saying To his critics Don't accept

Accept my leadership And apostleship Because of my Jewish heritage Or because of my Many ecstatic Spiritual experiences Which Golly Did he have them Or because of my Rhetoric ability No Look elsewhere Look at my Thorn in the flesh Look at God's grace And power At work Even in my Weakness In my affliction In my Disability I pray That this word Would speak to you Encourage you Move you To pray In your own Situation Pray For others And to Eagerly anticipate The Lord's Release From the affliction Or The Lord's Grace And his Power In the affliction I'm increasingly Aware As I Minister

Amongst God's people And As I Experience Life That all Of us Move Towards More Dependence Upon God As we Get older Who would Agree With that More Dependence More Dependence On others More Dependence Upon God I don't Think God's Made a Mistake In that I think It is a Parable Of life That we Are to Learn from When we Arrive in The world We're Utterly Dependent

Aren't We By the Way We're Picking Up our Puppy This Afternoon You knew It was Coming Somewhere In the Sermon And I Suspect Bramble Will Need Lots Of Care But I'm Sorry To Say This But I've Had Two Dogs Before Bramble Will Also Need Lots Of Care At The End Of Her Life And So Will You We can

Fight it We can Imagine It's Not Going To Happen But It Will Happen And Do You Know What God's Grace And His Power Can Be There For You Then As Well Do I Hear a Hallelujah Hallelujah Hallelujah Paul Concludes In Verse 10 This Is Why For Christ's Sake Can You Believe He's Saying I Delight In Weaknesses In Insults In Hardship In Persecutions In Difficulties For When I Am Weak Then I Am Strong Hallelujah Let's Pray Shall We And Then Judy's Going To Come And Help Us As We Respond Dear Father Thank You For Your Grace And Power At Work In Paul That Is Made Even More Evident Due To This Thorn In The Flesh Which We Don't Really Know What It Is We Recognize That Your Ways Are Not Our

Ways Give Us Courage To Pray And Ask For Prayer For Healing And Transformation By Your Loving Hand In Our Many Trials And Hardships And For Some Thorns In The Flesh We Invite You To Use These Weaknesses To Reveal Your Power In Our Lives Transform Our Mind And Our Lives So That We With Paul Can Say When I Am Weak I Am Strong Amen My Grace Is Sufficient For You My Power Is Made Perfect In Weakness Let's Consider That Grace Given To Us By God Who Accepts Us And Loves Us As We Are As

[66 : 26] We Approach The Lord's Table We Remember Lord Jesus Sacrifice For Our Sins We Remember His Body Broken Not For Anything He Did Wrong But Because He Was Paying The Penalty For Our Sins The Lord Jesus Is Able To Save Completely Those Who Come To The Father Because He Lives To Intercede For Us So We Come In Repentance To Our Heavenly Father Become Broken Become Wounded Become Desperate Become Empty Become Guilty We Come To Be Pardoned By The Blood Of Christ The Lamb And We Praise God That He Welcomes Us With Open Arms Just

As We Are Please Stand As We Sing Just As I Am As I Am Without One Be But That Thy Blood Was Shed For Thee And That Thou Is Become To Thee For Lamb Of God I Come I Come Come Just As I Am And Waiting Not To Rid My Soul Of One Dark God To Thee Whose Blood Can Cleanse Each Spot O Lamb

Of God I Come I Come I Come I Come To Be Mended I Come Wounded To Be Heard I Come Desperate To Be Rescued I Come Empty To Be Filled I Come Guilty To Be Bordered By The Blood Of Christ The Lamb And I Walk Up With All All Is God Just As I Am Just As I Am I Would Be Lost That Mercy And Grace My Freedom Bought And Now To Glory In The Cross O Lamb Of God I Come I Come I Come Broken To Be Bended I Come Wounded To Be You I Come Desperate To Be Rescued I Come Empty To Be Filled I Come Guilty To Be Bored I Know God Of Christ The Lamb I Come Hold Up With All Hearts Praise God I Just As I Am I Am I Come To Be Wounded I Come To Be To Be Will I Come Blessed To Be Rest I Come Empty To Be Thrill I Come Guilty To Be Bored By By The Blood Of Christ The One And I Will Be With Open Arms Praise God Just As I Am

Praise God Just As I Am Well do Take a Seat And Can Those Serving Join Me That Would Be Great As They Come Forward I Don't Often Steal Roses But This One Comes From Just Outside The Church And I Deliberately Wore It Because On The Bottom Of It Was The Rest Of The Branch Sorry For Who Looks After The Front There Now Those And On It There Are Thorns Yeah So And Do You Like The Rose I Do Smells Completely Wonderful Do Sniff It Or You Can Come To Mine And Sniff Mine But It May Be A Bit In But Do Sniff Them Outside They Beautiful But Could You If You Do Just Touch The

[71 : 29] Thorns As Well Can You See Why Based On All That We've Shared This Morning I Invite You To This Table Where We Remember Jesus Christ Who Gave his Life As a Sacrifice For you And for Me He He He Was Wounded So That We Could Be Healed Do You Remember What Was Put On His Head If You've Got Questions About Thorns Can I Suggest You Go To The One Who Has A Crown Of Thorns On His Head He understands The Thorns In His Flesh He Was Bruised And Crushed For Your Iniquities He Was Wounded That We Might Have Our Sins Forgiven And We Might Be Set Free So

I Wonder Do You Come To This Table Feeling Strong This Morning Or Do You Come Feeling Weak This Table is for those who know they are weak and in need of a saviour, who know they have sinned and fallen short.

It's a table for those who know there's a record of wrongs, an arm long that could be put against them. And they know that that record and those accusations have all, if we confess our sins, have all fallen upon Jesus.

Isn't that amazing? He's willing not only to accept a crown of thorns thrust upon his head, but all your thorns too.

What love, what sacrifice, makes you want to cry like Judy did earlier. And he carries our tears in his bottle.

[73 : 35] I suggested to Elizabeth, he's got an especially large bottle for her. She needs it, she says.

So come to this table and look upon the elements and see in them the gift of a body broken for you. Jesus Christ's body was broken for you. Look upon the cup and see that Christ drank down the curse of sin.

He swallowed all the thorns on our behalf and gave us a new covenant sealed in his blood, a covenant of love.

Don't you want to eat and drink at this table? I'm going to pray and ask that as we eat and drink, the Lord himself will minister to us.

[74 : 38] the one with the crown of thorns on. I pray that he will feed you, strengthen you in body, mind, and spirit.

I pray that he would wash you with his blood and cleanse you of all sin. And I pray that you would know grace flowing to you, power being made perfect in weakness.

Let us pray. We thank you, dear Lord Jesus, that you know a lot about thorns. Thank you that you wore a crown of thorns for us.

Thank you that you understand our weaknesses, our brokenness, and our sin. And you've taken it all upon yourself on the cross.

We confess that we need you, our saviour. We are weak. We are needy. And you are our saviour. We place ourself in your hands.

[75 : 44] Touch us, Lord, as we take these elements. May they be to us the body and blood of Christ. May they minister as we act by faith. May they minister to us healing and grace and power.

And all God's people said, Amen. Amen. Amen. As you receive the bread, please take it and eat it. The body of Christ, given for you. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[76 : 51] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. sash hydrant. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[79 : 04] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[81 : 34] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

And I'd like us to pray this morning for Peter Ellens and David Rook. Peter is very unwell.

[84 : 10] And I'm going to say a moment.

Thank you.

And you may be aware that my father, you may be aware that my father has been diagnosed with vascular dementia. And my son, Michael, will be moving back with us permanently from June and is experiencing mental health issues.

And I'm going to say, you may be in the same thing.

And to give you a bit of a few, you may be in the same thing.

[86 : 25] I'm going to say, you may be in the same thing.

I'm going to say, you may be in the same thing.

Don and I will be in the same thing.

And I'll say, you may be in the same thing.

And I'll say, you may be in the same thing.

[88 : 54] Get told off for going on, you may be in the same thing.

I'll say, you may be in the same thing. And I'll say, you may be in the same thing. And I'll say, you may be in the same thing. I'll say, you may be in the same thing. And I'll say, you may be in the same thing. And I'll say, you may be in the same thing.

I'll say, you may be in the same thing. And I'll say, you may be in the same thing. And I'll say, you may be in the same thing. And I'll say, you may be in the same thing. I'll say, you may be in the same thing. I'll say, you may be in the same thing.

There'll be more of these upstairs, and you'll hear more about it. Thank you. Please start. Please start. Mayor iOS You came running, there was mercy in your hearts.

To fulfill the law and prophets, to a merchant name the world. From a prophet's glory to a cradle in the dust.

[90 : 38] Praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit, clean in one.

God of glory, majesty, praise forever to the King of kings.

To redeem the King of kings and to reconcile the lost.

To redeem the whole creation, you did not despise the cross. For even in your suffering, you soar to the other side.

Lord, this was our summation, Jesus, for our sake you died. Praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit, clean in one.

[92 : 07] God of glory, majesty, praise forever to the King of kings.

And the morning that you rose, all of heaven held its breath.

Till that stone was moved for good, for the Lamb had conquered death. And the dead rose from their tombs, and the angels stood in war.

For the souls for who'd come to the Father are restored. And the Church of Christ was born, then the Spirit lit the grave.

To redeem the Holy of the King of kings and the Lord. And the Holy of kings and the angels stood in war. For the Lord shall not be, shall not be. By His blood and in His name, in His freedom I am free.

[93 : 15] For the love of Jesus Christ, who has resurrected me. Praise the Father, praise the Son, praise the Spirit, three in one.

God of glory, majesty, praise the Son, praise the Spirit, three in one.

God of glory, majesty, praise forever to the King of kings. Praise forever to the King of kings.

Praise forever to the King of kings. of peace.

We draw to a close this morning. Let us hear the words of Paul in his letter to Timothy, urging him to be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

[94 : 55] I pray that as we each go from here, we will be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

And may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.

Amen. Amen.