

## Wednesday March 31

## Healed

### Isaiah 52:13–53:12

**13** See, my servant will act wisely; he will be raised and lifted up and highly exalted.

**14** Just as there were many who were appalled at him— his appearance was so disfigured beyond that of any man and his form marred beyond human likeness—

**15** so will he sprinkle many nations, and kings will shut their mouths because of him. For what they were not told, they will see, and what they have not heard, they will understand.

**1** Who has believed our message and to whom has the arm of the LORD been revealed?

**2** He grew up before him like a tender shoot, and like a root out of dry ground. He had no beauty or majesty to attract us to him, nothing in his appearance that we should desire him.

**3** He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

**4** Surely he took up our infirmities and carried our sorrows, yet we considered him stricken by God, smitten by him, and afflicted.

**5** But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed.

**6** We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all.

**7** He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

**8** By oppression and judgment he was taken away. And who can speak of his descendants? For he was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgression of my people he was stricken.

**9** He was assigned a grave with the wicked, and with the rich in his death, though he had done no violence, nor was any deceit in his mouth.

**10** Yet it was the LORD's will to crush him and cause him to suffer, and though the LORD makes his life a guilt offering, he will see his offspring and prolong his days, and the will of the LORD will prosper in his hand.

**11** After the suffering of his soul, he will see the light of life and be satisfied; by his knowledge my righteous servant will justify many, and he will bear their iniquities.

**12** Therefore I will give him a portion among the great, and he will divide the spoils with the strong, because he poured out his life unto death, and was numbered with the transgressors. For he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

### 1 Peter 2:21–25 (NIV84)

**21** To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.

**22** "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

**23** When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.

**24** He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

**25** For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

What Jesus accomplished for us on the cross is far too big to be summed up in a single word. Yesterday, we thought of it in terms of liberation; today, continuing with Henry Francis Lyte's hymn 'Praise my soul the king of heaven' we come to the second of the words in the 3<sup>rd</sup> line: HEALED. Lyte may have had in mind what Peter says in his first letter to the Christians in Asia Minor: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." This in turn echoes what the prophet Isaiah announced: "But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed."

In a pandemic, it's hardly surprising that when we hear the word 'healing' the focus narrows to doctors' surgeries, hospital wards, medicines and vaccines. But in the bible it means far more than that, so some of the theologians in the early church talked of the bread and wine of Holy Communion as 'medicine'. A woman was once helped by her son into a church which had a healing ministry. She was helped in because of a crippling medical condition that had left her wracked with pain and completely unable to walk unaided. As the minister gently probed her about her life history, they explored a terrible row she had had with her husband many years previously. Not only were words thrown at each other; so was some of the crockery. She had never forgiven him; it continued to lurk deep inside her, spreading like a cancer. In the church that day she was challenged to forgive him. At the end of her appointment she went home.

When she returned some days later, she walked in unaided and pain-free.

The woundedness that vividly describes the old-fashioned but accurate term 'sin' affects not only our dealings with other people. It disfigures us as well, in all sorts of ways including sometimes the physical. So when that woundedness is dealt with and healing – in its broadest sense – takes place, the results will be visible.

Yesterday I quoted the atheist Matthew Parris. Today, let me quote from another – the former Labour politician Roy Hattersley He once write this:

*"We atheists have to accept that believers are better human beings ... The only possible conclusion is that faith comes with a packet of moral imperatives that, while they do not condition the attitude of believers, influence enough of them to make them morally superior to atheists like me. The truth may make us free. But it has not made us as admirable as the average captain in the Salvation Army."*