

Jesus heals.

Jesus heals even the outcast, the outcast leper.

Jesus heals the servant of the outcast centurion,  
a Gentile, symbol of the hated occupying power.

He heals at a distance,  
a geographical distance,  
a distance in time,  
a distance in faith.

When David Hope became Archbishop of York in 1996,  
we did a grand 26-day tour of the diocese.

Once we visited an ancient little village school,  
with colourful displays and gleaming children.

Glimpsing behind a screen I saw a tiny child,  
ashen as death, flat out on a tatty PE mat.

I asked the headmistress what was going on.

‘Oh, he’s prone to epileptic fits,  
we just lie him down and let him sleep it off,  
he’s a twin, but his twin seems fine.’

It was all a bit queer. David Hope was a twin too.  
And that morning at our prayers in Bishopthorpe  
we’d read the Gospel account,  
where the disciples fail to heal an epileptic boy,  
and have to call on Jesus.

‘Sir, I believe,’ pleads the boy’s father,

‘Help thou my unbelief.’

‘This sort can only be cured by prayer,’

Jesus concluded.

So I prayed for the poor little lad with all my heart.

He didn’t get up though.

I felt bogus to the core.

I had forgotten about the incident  
until years later I came across the headmistress again.  
She'd popped up to put her son's Banns in.  
'That little boy, the twin, the epileptic,  
what happened to him?' I asked,  
as we reminisced about the Archbishop's visit  
all those years back.

'It's funny you should mention that,'  
the headmistress replied.

'That David Hope must be a holy man,  
because that little lad never had a fit again.'  
She actually seemed quite miffed,  
because several members of staff  
had spent days training how to handle him.

Jesus heals.

Not everybody.

He didn't switch off disease and illness

by coming into the world.

But from time to time

his heart was wrung out in pity

for the situations that he chanced upon,

the so poorly ones

who burst into his busy schedule,

breaking through roofs,

obstructing his path.

They merely touched the hem of his robe

and healing poured out.

Whenever your heart is wrung out in pity,

pray with all your heart

that Christ will travel

2000 years in time

and 3254 miles from Israel to Scarborough

and throw his arms around the poorly person

who has crossed your path:

‘Lord Jesus, have mercy!’

And who knows.

Someone, somewhere, today

may be praying precisely that over you!