many in the city. The king calls the citizens together to hear the preaching of the Apostle Adai, who explains that these miracles of healing prove the truth of the Gospel he has been sent to preach. As a result of the miracles of healing, and the preaching of Adai, Edessa's men and women are baptized Christians.

From then on, what we see in Edessa under the leadership of Adai and with

community that worshiped, taught, missioned and served. The *Teachings of Adai* describes a community that is faithful to the guidance given by the Apostle Adai on his deathbed, with the community demonstrating that faithfulness in its activities and preaching: 'All the men and women were modest, honourable, holy and pure ... they lived honourably in diligent service, relieving the burdens of the poor, and visiting the sick." ⁴

'The very sight of them spread peace to those who beheld them ... For that which they said to others and admonished them to do, they showed by deeds

And it stood [my body] firm for the Lord by His will.' (Ode 8)

'I lifted up my arms on high on account of the compassion of the Lord. And my helper lifted me up According to His compassion and His salvation. And I put off darkness And put on light. And I myself acquired limbs. In them there was no sickness, or affliction or suffering.' (Ode 21)

The author of the *Odes* believes that God permeates our existence the more we give ourselves to Him in worship, and that His healing affects our body and the disposition of our nature, bringing us peace and rest.

The Odes of Solomon are very early Syrian writings. As the Christian community grows, the emphasis on the worship and healing of the community itself becomes a dominant theme, like in *The Teachings of Adai* as we have already seen, and so also in the writings of St. Aphrahat the Persian Sage (c 280-c345): 'Give rest to the weary, visit the sick, provide for the poor: this is indeed prayer'. ⁶

St. Aphrahat is so conscious of the individual's place in the body of the community, that he states that the believer needs to act to bring healing and comfort to others if he is to receive the healing and salvation of Christ.

In one of his hymns, the theological and literary 'giant', Saint Ephrem the Syrian, (c306-373) states -

In one sense, it is easy to ask how relevant to us today is the pattern and vision of Edessa's church life in the fifth century.

We may find the answer if we look at some of the principles that underpinned the vision and activity of the kingdom of Edessa following the conversion of King Abgar V.

King Abgar was convinced that he had received divine healing.

- The circumstances of adopting the Faith the king's healing and the healing miracles performed by the one who had missioned to him, Saint Adai - convinced the community that healing was one of the essentials of the Christian Faith.
- ❖ They saw that there was a connection between the healing of the individual's body (to name one type of healing) and the 'body' of the Edessa community (namely the context of healing the king and the people).
- They believed that an integral part of their Faith was that the individual's healing called, qualified and empowered that individual to be a means of healing in and for the community.
- In addition to the integral connection between receiving and being a means of healing, the Syrian authors see a parallel and integral connection between worship and healing, and that worship, of course, includes the collective worship of the faith community.

Are not these principles underlying this 'Syrian' vision of the earliest centuries of Christianity equally as authentic for our contemporary society, and specifically for contemporary Wales? And does not the vitality of some of the most viable contemporary faith communities demonstrate that faith, prayer and the consuming longing for peace and justice and the struggle for them remain as central today as in fifth century Edessa? Perhaps we will have an opportunity to scrutinize this further.

+ Father Deiniol, Blaenau Ffestiniog

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