

A Spiritual Spring for the Week

Rev. Dr. John V. Callahan, Jr.

Sermon Text: John 5:1-15

Sermon Title: "Do You Want to Be Healed?" (Trekking through the Gospel of John)

Morrow Presbyterian Church, Morrow, GA

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"Do you want to be healed?" What an important question to ask: "Do you want to be healed?" Do you want somebody to get rid of all your problems, somebody to make your life better?

People want to be healed of cancer; that's why we raise so much money at Scones and Fables and Relay for Life. People want to be healed from this sluggish economy: they hope to find a job soon, enough work that will help get some food on the table. People want to be healed of emotional or mental pain, which they suffer because their families are not as loving as they want, because a relationship fell apart and it's hard to find somebody to care for them in a rugged, selfish world.

"Do you want to be healed?" Jesus asks the question to a man who has been an invalid for 38 years. 38 years! Some of us haven't reached 38 years of age. It took the Israelites 38 years, plus two more, to travel through the wilderness toward the Promised

Land.¹ This man has been journeying through his own wilderness with a body that doesn't work. He sits by a pool in the city of Jerusalem, day in, day out, sits there because he wants to be healed. Legend says that an angel stirs the water with a finger, causing bubbles to form that indicate some divine presence is affecting the water with holy power. Legend says that the first person to enter the pool receives the healing.

Apparently the power of one angel is only good for one application – it isn't enough to go around for every person crowding around that pool.

A certain man suffering from weak health for 38 years has tried to be the first one in, but someone else always gets there before him. Somebody always beats him to the water, and he is left empty-handed. The man isn't any better than the day before. Weak health turns into weak mental health, which leads to depression and isolation and hopelessness.

Now Jesus comes into this area by the Sheep Gate. He walks up to the pool called Bethesda with its five porches, and he selects this one man out of the multitude to speak with. Maybe Jesus could have chosen anybody, but he approaches the man who has suffered for 38 years, and he asks him a simple

¹ William Barclay, *The Gospel of John: Volume 1*, cf. 176.

question: “Do you want to be healed?”

How would we have responded to such a question? Let’s say we have not been ourselves for 38 years. We have plans and ambitions – we have mapped out in our brains all sorts of places we would like to visit and all sort of people we would like to meet. We would love just to work, if we could, and not depend on somebody else to earn our money, or feed us, or bathe us, or clothe us. We cannot do a single thing we want to do, because our confounded bodies won’t let us.

If we were sarcastic people, we may say to Jesus, “No, not really. Why do you think I sit next to this pool with these pathetic people day in and day out?” But if we are hopeful people, we may say, “Yes, of course. Yes, I want to be healed. Is there anything you could do for me?”

How does the man respond to Jesus in the story? Not with a resounding YES, but with a complaint. “Well, you see, I can’t get into the pool because people keep pushing me out of the way. I keep trying but I just can’t be the first person in. And I don’t have anyone to help me get in the water, because they’re all concerned about themselves, and they don’t care about anybody else. That’s the way society is today, you know. Nobody thinks of others. It was never that way when I was a kid. Life was so much easier 30

years ago: people talked to each other, and helped each other. People were happy all the time years ago...”

We really cannot blame the man for responding to Jesus with a sorrowful complaint. He really wants to be healed. He really thinks he can be healed one day. But he has become so focused on the water, staring at the surface for hours, anticipating when the bubbles will form and the holy power will come. He has been so focused on his pathetic state, stuck next to a pool when he could be doing other things, more fun things. Hopelessness builds upon hopelessness, and he cannot see an end. He almost misses a chance for Jesus to really heal him.

“Do you want to be healed?” We would want to say yes, but the sad thing is that some people don’t want to be healed. They actually say “no” to the question. We might think such a thing is ridiculous, but it happens every day.

It might have been the 19th Century Danish philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard, or some other person, who told the story of the prisoner who lived much of his life in a dark and damp cell. The man ate moldy pieces of cheese, concrete pieces of old bread, and stale water for his meals, and languished in that dark

patch of Hades for a long time. The stone walls were rough and slimy. All the man had was a bed of straw with no pillow, and infected rats for friends. One day, the burly jailer unlocks the door, and tells the prisoner that he is free to go. He has served his sentence, and so he doesn't have to live in that cell anymore. A stream of light that penetrates the cell blinds the prisoner. He blinks away tears from his eyes, as they adjust. He stands up, and cautiously walks to the doorway, where he can see tall green grass, and bright blue sky. He can smell fresh air and blossoming flowers. The day is so beautiful compared to his pathetic former home, so that his heart leaps in his chest, and he can hardly breathe. He is born again, free to live whatever life he wants to live. But then his wide smile turns into a dark frown. The world outside is bright, but it is scary. It is warm and cozy, but it is also unknown and unpredictable. The prisoner turns back around, and sits down on the dirty hay on the cold floor, and tells the jailer to shout the door. "Lock me in – it's safer here."

For some reason, people think their identity is to play the victim, or play the martyr, who suffers terribly from life. They complain every day about some pain or some problem they have to face. Their faces are drawn, and their words are labored. We who observe

such people know that they are only acting. They aren't the victim, but only pretend to be victims. They are not suffering, truly suffering, only adding to their own problems with such negative attitudes. But they must persist. Nothing can save them, not even the sound advice we give. There is no hope, when we are giving them hope every day. They sit in their dark prisons and languish, when they need to be out in the fresh, warm air.

“Do you want to be healed?” We would like to say “yes” as a response, but we may doubt it can happen. Most people don't play the victim and add to our own stress, but they also don't trust that any healing can come their way. They have suffered too much pain, visited too many doctors, received too much bad news. The relationship is over, and there is no way of sowing in back together. The job is lost and the bank account is dwindling. Just count us as a part of the millions of poor saps who are unemployed across the country. Life is hard and people are hard too, and it's very difficult to keep from feeling callous, from acting inconsiderate. We would like to be healed, but could healing really occur? Does Christ our Savior have it in him to take care of us?

“Do you want to be healed?” What sort of healing do we want? When we hear the word *healing*, we might think something physical will change in us. A pain in our bodies will go away, and we will not be short of breath as we were before, and we will be all better. Physical healing is only piece of the puzzle. Real healing – the healing Jesus Christ offers us – comes in the restoration of the whole person, every aspect of our lives. Christ’s healing involves a mental healing, a transformation of our minds when we think only about the things of God, when we know God’s salvation will never leave us no matter what we suffer each day. Christ’s healing involves an emotional healing, a restoration of our emotional state in which we do not fear anything. No bad news can disturb us, no pain or problem can delay us. We can walk through the valley of the shadow of death, but we will still worship and serve the God we love. Christ’s healing involves a spiritual healing, a renewing of our relationship with God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit that might have weakened, because we are too focused on other things.

When the Jews speak of shalom, the word means more than just peace. *Shalom* means wholeness: complete, perfect wholeness of every part of our lives, physical, mental, emotional, spiritual. *Shalom* means

all is good with God, even though we might not entirely understand God's ways. *Shalom* means everything is good with others, although we might not see eye to eye all the time, but we're working on it. They are children of God, just as we are. The broken pieces are being mended. The wounds are being healed, and the weak spots are being shored up. This is the healing Christ is offering us, a chance to become new people with God in all grace, righteousness, and life.

“Do you want to be healed?” You know, Jesus' question isn't really a question, but a statement. He doesn't give the man who has suffered for 38 years an option – “I could either heal you or leave you beside this pool” – Jesus is giving the man one option, one option alone. He says to the man, “Rise, take up your bed and walk.” It is a command Jesus gives. “Get up! Don't think about it; do it, now!” And immediately strength courses through the man's body, which he hasn't felt in a very long time. That strength motivates him to stand up, and he does. The man walks around, probably shouting and laughing as he does, which attracts attention to him. The Jews question the healing on the Sabbath day, and all the man can say is, “He who made me walk said, ‘Take up your bed and walk’.” Jesus encounters the man later on, and tells

him not to sin any more. “Stop holding on to a superstition to heal you – only God can and will. Do not wallow in suffering, but rejoice in the new life that God the Father has given you.”

The man goes away, and this part I love. He now could do anything he wants with his new body. The whole world is opened to him, and so he can accomplish any goal and live the life he plans for himself. What does he do, though? He tells “the Jews that it was Jesus who made him well.”² He lives his new life for Christ.

“Do you want to be healed?” It isn’t a question Jesus poses to us. It is a statement. Jesus means to fix us. He is fixin’ to change us and make us whole, *shalom*. The Word made flesh wants us to be at ease in our flesh as children of God.

It starts with a removing of our current situation, an escape from the jail, a departure from the pool, a different perspective, and new hope. It continues with Christ working in us rebirth, conversion, detoxification, a complete overhaul of mind, body, and spirit. The Word became flesh, because God the Father did not want any of us perishing. It is his desire to save us from whatever ails us, whatever sin

² John 5:15.

can throw at us to keep us from loving ourselves, others, and God.

Jesus brought healing to a woman back in John 4, who wanted to argue rightful places of worship and the coming Messiah.³ “I am here right now,” Jesus told her. “Leave your so-called husbands. Leave the sad and isolated life you are living. Receiving living water that restores.” Jesus brought healing to a father who couldn’t get the disciples to give some proper healing to his out-of-control son.⁴ “I want to believe, help my unbelief,” he told Jesus. And Jesus did just that. The demon was removed. The body was brought back to his right mind and state of being. The family was restored.

“Do you want to be healed?” Whatever it is, Jesus means to heal us. However heavy the burden is, and however impossible we think it is to be cured, Jesus means to touch of lives, to order us to pick up our beds, and to walk. As we walk, the healing effects will not dissipate. They continue to work through our bodies, minds, and spirit, until the day we are fully restored in heaven.

“Do you want to be healed?” Hopefully, each one of us would boldly answer Jesus, “YES!”

³ Cf. John 4:5-42.

⁴ Mark 9:14-29.