

Made Well

John 5

Today is the sixth Sunday of Easter. Most congregations are hearing a sermon from John will again be learn about Jesus' command to love and his promise of the coming Holy Spirit. However our scripture is not from Jesus farewell speech, but rather one of the passages in John that tell about Jesus' compassion, hospitality, and miraculous power. This was Jesus' third sign miracle and it revolved around the issue of time. The man at the pool of Bethesda had lain there for 38 years – an entire lifetime as a person with a disability, unable to work, unable to contribute to his society. Indeed, he had probably started laying at that pool before Jesus was even born. Imagine the disappointment he must have experienced time after time when the angle stirred up the pool, but always he had arrived too late to experience healing. This man had been sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus approached the man and asked him if he wanted to be made well. Within the man's response we learn how healing would typically happen in the pool. Out of his own experience, he answered Jesus. He knew how his healing would happen. God always worked the miracle the same way. So he knew when the waters began to shake, the first person to step into the water would be made well. The second, third or later persons would not be healed, only the first person. That was how God did things and therefore there was no hope for his healing. In his condition, he was waiting for healing, but he knew that he could not reach the pool by himself. He had lived in his own world, his own prison that no one could reach except Jesus. He had lived in by the pool barely surviving and not knowing how to escape. He was not welcome in the temple because he was a person with a disability. The limitations of his knowledge of healing and access itself obstructed faith. He did not know

who Jesus was, nor had he heard of Jesus, which we learn if we continue to read of the encounter. Unlike other seekers, this man did not seek out Jesus. For thirty-eight years, without any family or friends, he had been alone. His lack of knowledge and his powerlessness prohibited him from looking for Jesus.

However, Jesus came to this man first and asked him if we wanted to be made well. Jesus replied with three imperatives or directions: “stand up, take your mat and walk.” No shaking water...no long lines of people waiting for the waters to move...no rushing to the pool to be first! These were the same three imperatives that Jesus had stated when he healed another person. The miracle that is found in Mark 2:1-12. However, this time there is a major difference. While the healing in Mark happened in response to the faith of the man’s friends, this healing story does not show any sign of required faith. Requiring faith was a common condition of other healing stories or miracle stories, but this story did not ask for anything from the person. Jesus simply healed the man and asked him to rise, take up his bed, and walk. Jesus healed him immediately and he was able to walk.

This is a healing story, but also it is a story of Jesus’ radical hospitality. Jesus healed a person who does not have faith, who knows deep suffering and pain. The compassion of Jesus saw the need of this person despite his lack of faith or knowledge about Jesus. Jesus sought out the sick man and wanted to heal him. Jesus’ radical hospitality brought healing to the man and made him well even on the Sabbath day.

The act of Jesus’ hospitality risks flouting his tradition. Jesus was accused of violating Sabbath law. However, the attitude of Jesus was “My Father is still working, and I also am working” to heal the sick, the powerless, the marginalized, the poor, the wounded, and the earth. The compassion of Jesus, his radical hospitality, made those people well and restores the earth. He did not hesitate to

reach out to the people who did not know him. Jesus showed himself to be the master of time.

On Friday and yesterday, some of us attended John Palmer's visitation and funeral service. I thought of John when I studied this scripture. John had heard the good news about Jesus as a youth and accepted him as Lord and Savior and was baptized in a creek down in Kentucky. But then John got busy living...or what he thought was living. He was intellectually gifted and apparently a good business man. But he was emotionally sick. Anyone one would be sick who lost three of their five children. We also learned that he had not been successful in maintaining his marriage and his relationship with his two remaining children was often strained. I don't know what else may have made him sick. When John attended Carl Bob Huber's funeral he remembered two things. First he remembered the faith that he accepted as a youth in Kentucky. Second, he remembered Carl's faithful example when they worked together years before. So, John returned to the roots of his faith and joined Unity. He never missed an opportunity to tell me how glad he was that he found us and that he felt at home here. His relatives and friends were pleasantly surprised when John became a member of Unity. It gave them comfort and peace to know that John had an experience with Jesus. Not because John was intellectually brilliant, not because of his grief and pain, but because of Jesus' grace and hospitality....John was healed from what ailed him and he rose, took up his bed and walked.

Jesus' hospitality crossed over traditional boundaries and took risks for people, even risking death. He did not withhold his love from others. He exercised this radical hospitality beyond his death and completed it through his resurrection. He asks his beloved children, his beloved friends, and his beloved community to carry forth this hospitality and keep his commandments of love. **Choi Hee An**

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