

It may be that the question from last Sunday's sermon is valid for us today as well, "What are you doing here?" Maybe it's an important question for every Sunday. To answer that question as a response to this passage from Acts, we would need to consider ourselves one of three characters in the story: the crippled man, Peter, or one of the amazed among the crowd that sees the man- now healed- and listens to the impromptu sermon. So, taking our cue from the text means that we are here today to be healed, or to understand that we need healing; or we are here to rejoice at being healed and to share the joy of health with others; or that we are here to learn how to heal. Of course, we could list many more reasons for worship than just healing, but these seem to be the focus of this scripture.

There are some strange elements in this passage. First, we must acknowledge that Peter and John, heading to the Temple to pray- as the first verses of chapter 3 tell us- are still devout Jews, just as Jesus was all his life. And so, we must recognize that our Lord and Savior- and then, his closest followers and our apostolic teachers- did not set out to start another religion, or to break from Judaism. Even though that runs counter to all we have

thought for so long, believing Christianity to be the only “God approved” faith. But there was another one before us. And that knowledge should take away any religious pride we might possess; and you likely know people who are arrogant about their faith.

2) Peter says he has no money to give the man, but that can’t be true, the thousands who have been converted sold everything they had (2:45) and made it available to anyone in need. He had money for alms, so what is going on here? I think it’s just that Peter sees the man doesn’t need benevolence for today so much as he needs healing. And the man’s reaction proves Peter is right: he leaps up, walks into the temple, praising God, and jumping and rejoicing.

3) Every day the man was carried to an entryway into the Temple, where he could be seen and beg- and there, at the Beautiful Gate, he was healed and walked and leapt into the Temple. But then suddenly, verse 11, they are at the edges of the Temple grounds, at Solomon’s Portico, in the shade of the outer wall, and opposite the doors of the Temple. So here is a discontinuity in the action, or maybe it’s just that time has passed. But this occasion gives the astonished crowd the chance to rejoice with the man- they

knew him, saw him every day they came to worship; maybe it means they wouldn't have to contribute to him any longer. And it gives them a chance to learn about health and healing: look what Peter says at the end of our passage, that the man was brought to health by faith in Jesus.

4) Which creates yet other questions. "Faith in the name of Jesus"? The man had no faith in Jesus, he was just trying to survive, a day at a time, and then Peter and John come, and everything changes- and for the better we believe, and it appears the man thought so, too. But he didn't have faith, until Peter spoke to him in verse 6 the name from whence comes the power to heal, Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah. I'm sure he has faith now! And this is the word that Peter can speak to the crowd, verified by this man they all knew, that Jesus heals.

5) And strange, also, that in Peter's sermon, he calls Jesus "God's servant" (verse 13), but then with no explanation, calls him "Holy and Righteous," "the Author of life." These are non-sequiturs. It is a long, nonsensical reach, from "servant" to "Creator," unless you were taught a particular theology that led to such a confession. Maybe this is the author's

shorthand statement of faith in Jesus, but one that would have made more sense to the readers of Acts than to the crowd outside the Temple that day.

6) But here is the real question, for me at least- not a problem, but it is confusing. It is the source of the sermon title, from verse 16, though there is no satisfactory way to translate this phrase, “perfect health.” In Greek, it is one word, and this is the only use of the word in the New Testament, but its root meaning has nothing to do with healing; thus my confusion. But it carries a sense of holistic wellness, a whole and sound body and mind. It isn’t the word Jesus spoke when he healed someone, and would often say, “Your faith has saved you.” But Peter isn’t thinking about the miracle, and not even about “saving the man’s soul,” but about creating a relationship with the Lord who makes body and mind and spirit right and whole.

7) And even more. With the healing and the rejoicing that follows as a natural result and the gathering and the teaching that come after, Peter builds, in effect, a community and calls the people to faith in Jesus: calls on them to share in the joy of this man made well, and gives them instruction in healing- that it comes through “faith in the name of Jesus,” and gives them reasons for gathering together to worship- “this has happened *in your*

*presence*,” he says. Not the miracle, people weren’t watching that, but they saw what came later. And so, we as readers are made to understand that healing is more than the miracle, it is also the connection that draws us to one another, in our desire for wholeness and our need for shared community; needs that are met by the one who gives us strength in our weak parts and healing in the places that are broken. This is what gives us hope and wholeness, his healing presence among us: this is perfect health.

Five years ago today, my favorite sports team, the Dallas Mavericks, won the NBA championship. A great day. And I remember one thing about that night relevant to our scripture- the celebration after the game, one of the Mavericks heroes holding tightly the championship trophy, and saying, “12 years I’ve been playing for this- and I ain’t lettin’ it go!” He was just like the man in our passage, healed and leaping and shouting for joy. And then verse 11, he “clung to Peter and John,” not because he was tired, but because he had been given the very thing that made his life right and meaningful, and he didn’t want to let it go. Perfect health for him didn’t mean only that his legs now worked perfectly, but that his whole self was sound and strong and right. So, yes, Peter gave him the best gift after all, not cash for one day, but

a new self-image and joy, and a welcoming community to share the hopes, and the hurts, of this life.

So if the power of God's love and forgiveness gives us perfect health, should our response to love be that we try to make health for others? Should we apply for medical school, or become nurses? It might be a little late for some of us. Should we become charismatic evangelists, making miracles so the lame can walk again? It may be that we are called to volunteer at the hospital, or Helping Hands and Body of Christ Clinic, or donate when we see the ads on TV for St. Jude's Children's Hospital. Or maybe just pray for the sick- and really mean it.

It probably means caring for the poor in various social and political ways, perhaps even demanding our legislators pass bills for improved health care, and larger budgets for medical research, for better working conditions and a more livable wage so that people can eat better.

Of course, there are many ways to serve as God's agents of healing. As people who have experienced God's grace, there is much for us to do. If people require healing, then we must admit that something is wrong and needs to be changed. But we must not be content with the status quo that

leaves so many behind, sick and broken. The urgent truth is we cannot do nothing. Let's start by giving thanks for the healing our Lord gives, and by striving to possess healthy emotions and more forgiving hearts. And by sharing the gift that has brought us together: a healthy, humble faith, that expresses itself in compassion and hope. So may we live as examples to others of the mercy that makes us whole.