

Do You Want to Be Well?

John 4:43-5:47

John Breon

The focus of this section is on Jesus as the Life-Giver. The healings he performs demonstrate that he gives life now and forever.

4:43-54

John says this is the second sign in Galilee that reveals Jesus' glory (the first was turning water into wine at a wedding feast). Jesus is back in Cana in Galilee and a royal official comes from Capernaum, about twenty miles away, to beg Jesus to come heal his son, who is close to death.

Jesus' reaction shows that he doesn't want to perform signs and wonders just for the sake of the signs and wonders. The man doesn't care about signs and wonders—he just wants his son well. Jesus sends him on his way with the assurance that the boy will be all right. The man has faith in Jesus' word and heads back home. On the way, his servants meet him and tell him that his son has recovered. He discovers that the boy began to get well at the time Jesus said, "Your son will live." The official and everyone in his household come to believe in Jesus, the One who gives life.

5:1-15

Some time later, Jesus goes back to Jerusalem. In the city is a pool called Bethesda where a great number of disabled people are gathered. The story goes that an angel comes and stirs the waters from time to time and whoever is the first to get into the water is healed. In that crowd is a man who's been an invalid for thirty-eight years. *Jesus saw him.* Jesus sees you. He sees each one of us. He notices each one of us.

Learning about the man's situation, Jesus asks him, "Do you want to get well?" That seems like a strange question. What if you went to the emergency room and the doctor said, "Do you want me to set your broken arm?" "Do you want to feel better?"

The obvious answer seems to be, "Of course I want to get well—that's why I'm here!" But maybe it's not so obvious. Maybe the man was so

identified with his illness, his disability, that he couldn't really image life without it. Are we ever content with our problems? Maybe we cling to them and find security in the sameness. Are we ever afraid to leave that security behind and face the challenge of something different, of life without that problem or pain?

Nancy and I knew a woman years ago who was just negative. She started every conversation with the word "No." Even if you hadn't asked her a question. And we learned not to ask how she was, because she always told how she was—and it usually wasn't good. But even if you didn't ask, she would often tell you. "No, I haven't been feeling very well." "No, my son hasn't called." "No...." We also learned not to offer helpful suggestions to her because she always had some reason why it wouldn't work. One day in a Bible study a man made an interesting comment, perhaps with this woman in mind, though she wasn't present at the time. He said, "Some people are just happy in their misery." Do you want to get well? Do you want to be made whole?

We can hear this as individuals, but we can also hear it collectively as the church. What if Jesus diagnosed our church? Would he see us as healthy, vibrant, alive and growing? Would he see some areas where the church is in need of healing? What if he asked the church, "Do you want to be well?"

Churches go through life cycles. The aim is "sustained health." But sometimes churches start sliding into "maintenance" where we just kind of hang on to what we have and where we don't grow significantly. Unless there's a change, the slide can continue to "preservation." That's where a church scrambles and struggles to stay afloat. Again, without intervention, the next step is "life support" and then death. Jesus wants to intervene. He wants to give new life, inspire us with his vision, recall us to his mission. He wants the church to be well and whole (see Tony Morgan, *The Unstuck Church*).

When Jesus asks the man if he wants to get well, the man makes excuses. He says, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred."

The man's looking to the wrong source for healing. He doesn't know Jesus and his healing power. He's looking to the pool when he needs to look to the power of Jesus. In our lives, what excuses do we make? What inadequate solutions do we seek? We may hesitate to pray because we're afraid of being disappointed. Or we get locked into thinking a certain way. We need a different way of seeing and thinking about the problem.

Jesus cuts through all the man's excuses and tells him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." And at once the man is cured, healed, set free. He picks up his mat and walks. Can you imagine hearing the healing word of Jesus in your deepest need, in your pain or sorrow or struggle or illness or relationships? Can you imagine that situation being transformed? Can you imagine passing from sickness to health, from pain to relief, from death to life?

It was the Sabbath when Jesus healed the man by the pool. The religious leaders accused the man of breaking Sabbath rules by carrying his mat. The man blamed the one who healed him for telling him to carry it on the Sabbath. Later, *Jesus found him*. He finds us, doesn't he? Jesus warned the healed man to leave his sin. Jesus isn't saying that each sickness is a direct result of specific sin. But somehow this man's illness and his sin were tied up together. Then the man, still acting kind of dense, goes to the religious leaders and tells them it was Jesus who healed him and told him to carry his mat.

An argument ensues between Jesus and the religious leaders. During that discussion, Jesus points out that God is always present and active and Jesus is just doing what he sees his Father doing. He loves, he raises the dead, he gives life, he judges. Jesus invites us to hear him, to believe in him and to have eternal life now and in the future. The healings he did, and that he does, are signs of his power to give life. Healing now is a picture of, and a foretaste of, the ultimate healing in resurrection when Jesus returns. Eternal life being here already gives us confidence to pray for healing. Eternal life isn't here yet in all its fullness and that helps us understand when healing doesn't come now the way we might want it.

Christian songwriter Wayne Watson wrote a powerful song about healing:

I'm trying hard not to think you unkind
But Heavenly Father, if you know my heart
Surely you can read my mind
Good people underneath the sea of grief
Some get up and walk away
Some will find ultimate relief

Out in the corridors we pray for life
A mother for her baby, A husband for his wife
Sometimes the good die young
It's sad but true
And while we pray for one more heartbeat
The real comfort is with you

You know pain has little mercy
And suffering's no respecter of age, of race or position
I know every prayer gets answered
But the hardest one to pray is slow to come
Oh Lord, not mine, but Your will be done

Home Free, eventually
At the ultimate healing we will be Home Free
Home Free, oh I've got a feeling
At the ultimate healing
We will be Home Free
(*Home Free* 1990)

In the last section of chapter five (31-47), Jesus speaks of testimonies about himself. There are several witnesses that testify about who Jesus is. He's the Son of God, the Giver of Life. John the Baptist, the works the Father gave Jesus to do, the Father who sent Jesus, the Scriptures (including Moses) all tell something about who Jesus is.

Failing to recognize these witnesses, many people refused to come to Jesus to have life. Though they searched the Scriptures looking for eternal

life, they missed the Scriptures' witness about Jesus who gives the life they were looking for.

Let's not miss the witness to Jesus. Let's come to him and find life and healing. Do you want to get well, to be made whole—in spirit, in mind, in body, in emotions, in relationships? Will you hear the word of Jesus speaking healing to you? Are you willing to change from the life you've known to the life of wholeness Jesus offers?