

Living Lent | Day 24

Do You Want To Be Healed

There was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk’?” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath. But Jesus answered them, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” For this reason the Jews were seeking all the more to kill him, because he was not only breaking the sabbath, but was also calling God his own Father, thereby making himself equal to God.

John 5:1–18 RSV

Encouragement for the Lenten Journey:

The stirring waters at Bethzatha were supposed to cure the first person to bathe in the pool after this movement of the water. Every day a man (we don't know his

name) had tried desperately on his useless feet and legs to reach the pool. Sometimes, he almost made it but it seems like someone else always beat him to it. They had friends to help them and they would push past him and he was always brushed aside. And so every day he would crawl back to the too-familiar place where he had had lain for so long.

Then one day Jesus came along and asked him, "Do you want to be healed?" Now that seems like a cruel thing to ask of a man who had been sick for so many years and had not been able to get in the pool because he was alone without friends. But Jesus wanted to find out how sincere the man was and how much he wanted to be healthy. The question was addressed to a man who had been crippled for 38 years who might have lost the desire to be well.

It seems that the man had fallen into the pit of self-pity. Oh, he went through the motions of seeking healing, but maybe he preferred it the way it was. Being excused from all active participation in life has its rewards. After all, that meant that he didn't have to hold down a job. He could use his sickness for not taking responsibility for his life.

Many years ago, I had an assistant pastor whose job involved visiting our members who were homebound and those in nursing homes. He would frequently come back from these visits and tell me that this person or that was "enjoying their poor health." In other words, they had gotten quite used to being dependent on others and not having to do much. They weren't really interested in getting better.

The truth is that it takes a great deal of courage to be healed by Jesus – for physical health is not an end in itself. To be healed by Jesus means to be committed to a greater purpose. The bigger question might be "Do you have the courage to be healed?"

There's an expression "Better the devil I know than the devil I don't know." That's the attitude that made the Israelites moan and groan in the wilderness with Moses because they were facing the unknown. They thought that they would be better off going back to Egypt. At least there, they knew what to expect.

We often find ourselves in unhealthy relationships or unhappy working situations and we justify continuing as we are – because we at least know what to expect. We don't have the courage to be changed, to be healed.

Ultimately, we need to be healed from within. Life begins to make real sense when we understand that we carry within us the enemy we have to defeat. It's only when we allow the Great Physician to cure our fears and suspicions that we are able to wage our battle with faith and assurance. And that's when we are able to reach out and serve others.

But the first question is always the same, "Do you want to be healed?"

Contributor and Contributing Body of Christ

The Rev. Marcia Cochran is the pastor of the Jekyll Island United Methodist Church, which is located on the western side of the Island. With a rich history that dates to the middle of the 1950's after Jekyll Island had been purchased by the State of Georgia and opened to the public, people began to move onto the Island and held services at Faith Chapel. Groundbreaking for the present church site was held on 5 September 1965. Rev. Cochran's service to Jekyll succeeds a similar commitment to St. Simons Island, having previously served the St. Simons United Methodist

Church, leading Rev. Cochran to a full and rich understanding of the needs of the Children at Morningstar.

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