

Would You Like to Get Well? Sunday, 1/10/21

“Would you like to get well?”¹ That’s the question Jesus asked the man sitting by the pool, waiting for the water to be stirred. It’s a curious case of healing. Nothing the man says or does seems to indicate a faith in God. He doesn’t know the name of Jesus, doesn’t ask Jesus to heal him, and seems to believe that his best chance of being healed is to enlist aid from someone else to get him into the alleged healing pool rather than to appeal to Jesus for healing. What’s more, the man seems quite willing to put the blame on Jesus when he’s later confronted by the religious authorities over breaking the sabbath laws when it’s discovered he’s been healed. He doesn’t even answer the question Jesus asked of him, preferring instead to dodge personal responsibility for his predicament. It’s an odd question that Jesus asks him, isn’t it? Have you ever been asked the same question when you’ve visited a doctor? Perhaps you have indeed if the conversation involved weight loss or cutting back on alcohol or tobacco. But mostly, we assume that sick people want to get well. And yet Jesus is asking each of us that same question today. Would you like to get well?

Considering the large number of healings recorded in the Bible, and the fact that every one of us has needed healing at various times in our lives, it might be surprising to you that there is so much confusion in the world today about the relationship between faith and healing. Partly that comes from Biblical proof-texting, the practice of taking some isolated words or actions from the Bible without considering the context or the broader scope of teachings. It’s much easier to grab a quick phrase or incident from the Bible and run with it to prove your point. For example, we know and believe what James writes about healing: “The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”² It’s a comfortable thing to confess and to share with someone in need. And it is “true,” incidentally. However, we also know from experience that many of our prayers for healing appear to go unanswered. Is that because of a deficiency in righteousness on the part of the one praying? Or are such prayers, perhaps, only occasionally powerful and effective?

Understanding a spiritual truth usually requires a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding of Scripture. It can be difficult to make sense of teachings and actions that

¹ John 5:6. New Living Translation (2nd Edition).

² James 5:16. New International Version (2011)

appear to reflect different theological and practical perspectives, especially when Jesus is the one healer behind all of them. There are no simple, one-size-fits-all patterns, processes, or explanations for how and why some are healed and others apparently aren't. The result is that we often don't know how to pray or what to expect when we or those we care for are in need of God's healing. If our faith is strong enough, can we expect to be healed? Is it possible to be healed by God without faith in Jesus? Does an apparent lack of healing point to a deficient amount of faith?

Contrast the healing of the man at the pool with the healing of Bartimaeus,³ the blind man Jesus encountered on the side of the road outside of Jericho. Bartimaeus called out to Jesus by name, recognized him as the Messiah, and specifically asked Jesus to restore his sight. What's more, Jesus ended the encounter by saying to him, "your faith has healed you."⁴ The two healings couldn't be more different. Isn't the later the kind of healing we're more accustomed to hearing about? And yet, which of the two do you find more comforting? One might assume from the healing of blind Bartimaeus that the healing blessing of Jesus is reserved for only those who recognize his divinity and boldly ask for healing with sufficient faith. But the healing of the lame man at the pool reveals that idea to be bankrupt. And that's good news! We need a balanced reading and understanding of Scripture to better understand this business of healing.

Let's consider one more miraculous healing, that of the bleeding woman. I'm reading from the Gospel of Mark in the fifth chapter of the New Living Translation, beginning with verse 25. [{Read Mark 5:25-34 NLT}](#)

Just when you think you may have spotted a pattern that makes the healings of Jesus predictable, along comes another one that makes you think again. Did you notice that not only did Jesus not ask the woman if she would like to get well, he apparently didn't even consciously intend to heal the woman? He ended the encounter in the same way as his meeting with Bartimaeus, saying "your faith has made you well."⁵ But like the lame man by the pool, the woman never asked Jesus to be healed, believing instead that simply touching

³ Mark 10:46-52.

⁴ Mark 10:52. New Living Translation (2nd Edition)

⁵ Mark 5:34. Ibid.

his robe would be sufficient.

What are we to make of these strangely divergent healing stories? Why does Jesus touch some and not others? Why does Jesus restore the sight of Bartimaeus with a word but mix spit and mud to heal another blind man?⁶ Is there anything of value in these stories of healing that can give us hope for healing today?

When we ask Jesus in prayer for healing, there are some things we hope for, and other things that we can count on. It helps to know the difference. We can hope for complete, immediate healing of the problem we've asked Jesus to take care of. That does sometimes happen, even today. Jesus healed the man by the pool with only a word, and instantly. So if you're hurting, by all means, ask Jesus to be healed. And if you know someone who's hurting, it's part of your Christian calling as a follower of Jesus to lift up that person in prayer and ask for their healing. Remember that Hebrews defines faith as having "confidence in what we hope for and assurance about what we do not see,"⁷ so being hopeful in our prayer is one way we're called to be faithful in our prayer.

On the other hand, even when Jesus walked this earth as a man, there were some who asked for healing but did not appear to be healed. What are we to do when the immediate healing we hope for isn't forthcoming? Perhaps sometimes God's answer is "not yet." God is our sovereign Lord, and the Bible reminds us in 2 Peter that "With the Lord a day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years are like a day."⁸ How are we to judge the timing of God's answer when time itself is a part of God's creation? So sometimes we have to wait.

Sometimes God answers our prayer for healing differently than how we asked. If what we hope for doesn't coincide with what God knows is best for us and the communities we live in, then we shouldn't be surprised to find that God chooses something better for us. The Apostle Paul famously prayed three times for God to remove the "thorn" in his flesh,⁹ but God chose not to do so, knowing that Paul's witness to Jesus would be stronger and clearer

⁶ John 9:6

⁷ Hebrews 11:1. New International Version (2011).

⁸ 2Peter 3:8. Ibid.

⁹ 2Corinthians 12:8

otherwise. So sometimes we have to remember that we pray, “thy will be done,” and not “my will be done.”

But however and whenever God chooses to answer our prayers for healing, we can always be certain that God hears our prayer. God created us to be in holy relationship, and whenever we seek out God in prayer, I’m convinced that God is pleased by that. We can be certain that whenever we meet God in prayer, we’ll be changed by that encounter with the Holy One, in either large or small ways, perhaps often in ways that are invisible to us now. And we can be certain that our prayers for healing, if not answered now, will be answered fully in the resurrection, when we will inherit new, glorified bodies, and there will be no more suffering, and no more pain, only the glory of standing in the presence of God.

Let’s return to the question we started with. Would you like to be made well? There are some reasons why we might not want to be made well. It’s sometimes observed that beggars in ancient Palestine stood to lose a living wage if they were healed, although it’s hard for me to believe that someone with a serious disability wouldn’t gladly return to work if they could have their bodies made whole again. Perhaps we don’t want to be made well because we think we don’t deserve it, that our pain is somehow a just punishment for our failings in life. If that’s you today, then I encourage you to let go of your burden of shame and guilt and accept the forgiveness and healing that Jesus offers. But I imagine for most of us, the biggest reason we might have for not wanting to be made well is that change is hard, even positive change. An encounter with Jesus changes a life, and accepting a blessing of any kind from Jesus invites the power of God’s Spirit into our hearts. As I’ve said before, it’s no small thing to get involved with Jesus, because He wants everything, all of us. Do you want to be made well? Are you willing to risk the Holy Spirit turning your life upside down and setting you in a new direction?

If you’re hurting today, then I want you to know that Jesus loves you, and your church loves you. We’ll help you when and how we can, and especially we’ll pray for and with you, because prayer is never an empty gesture. In fact, in just a few minutes, we’ll devote our prayer time to seeking God’s healing, together.

With all the peculiar stories of healing that we find in the Bible, there is after all one thing that they all have in common. They all reveal that Jesus is the Son of God, the Lord of

life, who was born to initiate the coming of the Kingdom of God on earth. That Kingdom includes whole bodies, whole emotions, and whole relationships. They reveal that Jesus does care about how we're doing in all facets of our lives. They reveal that Jesus cares about you, even if you've given up on yourself. Jesus has the power and will to bring wholeness to your life. Would you like to get well?

Please take some time now to reflect on how you would like to be made well. If you like, you can share a comment or a prayer.



Bill Reinhart, Pastor
pastorbill@buffaloumc.com