***“Do You Want To Be Healed?”***

*a homily for May 25, 2025 by The Rev. Scott Dalgarno*

*based on John 5:1-9*

When I was a kid the things I enjoyed playing with most I made myself. I made my own board games and go carts. One of the first toys I ever made with help from a friend amounted to an empty wooden spool, a couple of match sticks, a rubber band, and a half inch of a wax candle with a hole drilled out of the middle.

Anyone remember such a thing?

In the story, as we have it from the Gospel of *John*, there was a festival of the Jews in Roman controlled Jerusalem. Jesus went up to the city -- doubtless there were food booths, magicians, ceramic bowls for sale, and simple crafted toys.

On this particular day, though, Jesus winds his way to a place beyond the festivities; a spot with five porticos littered with grass mats upon which lay the blind, the lame.

It’s a kind of make-shift hospital; the kind the Trump administration is working hard to bring back via the House of Representatives bill with its gargantuan cuts this week to Medicaid which triggering automatic cuts to Medicare in the amount of $500 billion; all so the folks at the very top can get the huge tax cut they desperately need.

The gospel focus is on a man who is partly paralyzed. He had planted himself beside a supposed healing pool 38 years before this day and he is still there. Thirty-eight years – that’s longer than most people lived in the first century.

The story specifically states that Jesus, knowing that he had been there a long time, asked the man a question: “Do you want to be healed?"

“Does he want to be healed?” My heavens, 38 years??? A silly question or . . . . maybe not?

Think about it. What would it mean for a man who had been in such a state for 38 years to be healed?

I mean, imagine. If he were healed there’d be a whole new set of expectations for him.

Let me suggest that Jesus, asking the question, "Do you want to be healed?" is an act of compassion.

This gospel text is specified for use today and I’m particularly happy to preach it because it was THE story in the gospels that did the most to make me want to be a minister, specifically a teaching one. I read this story closely in my early 20s and it spoke to me, profoundly.

You know, Jesus is often linked with something we’ve heard about all our lives: *The Golden Rule* -- “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Jesus is, in fact, often stamped with the authorship of that phrase, but you can find a number of versions of it cropping up in religions all around the globe. It’s lovely, however, there are limits to the Golden Rule.

In our lifetime there has been lots written about a *Platinum Rule --* “Do unto others as they would be done by.” That is to say, don’t just do for people what *you* would like – take the time to find out what *they* might really want before you “help” them.

This Platinum Rule, too, sounds really good. But, you know, it was picked up by marketing gurus and used to more effectively sell things to people they don’t need.

Well, what I want to point to here is that the story of Jesus’s interaction with the paralyzed man tells us that Jesus is more than a Golden Rule or Platinum Rule “do-gooder.” He doesn’t merely give people what he thinks they need. He cares enough to ask them what they are willing or unwilling to accept.

I think Jesus’ integrity is, in fact, measured by this signature tuned-in, custom-made, respectful behavior he exhibits to individuals. And that integrity is powered not by his ego. It is driven by his natural empathy; his deep fellow feeling, which is what’s missing from the Platinum Rule.

Over and over in his interactions with people, rich or poor, he gets them. He understands them better than they understand themselves, but he never uses that as a lever for anything.

He offers what he has and lets them take it or not. This is what hooked me on Jesus, before I’d ever heard of the Platinum Rule or it’s short comings.

On this day when I am being installed as a fully called pastor of this church I am happy to be reminded of what makes Jesus Jesus.

I remember being given a lesson in this during the first pastoral call I made at my first church. I was very green!

I asked the office manager, who in the congregation might appreciate a visit and she said, “Dorothy,” a woman who lived a block away from the church whose husband had passed away just a couple of months before.

Dorothy was a very well dressed, proper woman. She had nursed her husband faithfully for a number of years before he died.

She answered her door and I immediately told her how sorry I was for her loss. Dorothy didn’t skip a beat. She said, “Don’t be sorry. I’m not. He was a skunk. Now I go dancing three nights a week. I’m finally having a good time in life.” Well, you never know where people are coming from.

“Do you want to be healed?” There is a hornet’s nest hidden in that question.

I remember a Presbyterian minister colleague of mine (this is 40 years ago) pastoring a church in NE Portland who went around anointing people with oil, people who had cancer. He would pray over them with an elder from his church and then he would tell them they were healed as a result of his prayer but that they needed to “appropriate” their healings.

That is, he would tell them that if they had enough faith they would get well. If not, they would stay sick. This left most, if not all of them, sick and also guilt ridden thinking they didn’t have enough faith.

I knew some of these people; I knew their families. I was called upon to try to clean up that minister’s messes sometimes. It was appalling.

That said, I believe there are, in fact, people, sometimes, who choose to try and NOT get well

I know of a woman, grown now, who when she was all of six years old, was hospitalized for a long period with Hepatitis A. She swears that she spent much longer in the hospital than she needed to and all because she willed herself NOT to get better.

She overheard her parents talking early in her illness about their desire to divorce, and she thought that as long as she was very sick they'd stay together.

“Do you want to be healed?” Not always.

You know, the lame man in the gospel story does not answer Jesus' question directly. He is, in fact, very defensive – "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is troubled; I'm lame. I can’t get there. It’s a catch 22."

Maybe he is really saying something like, "I have no one to put me in the water. I have . . . . no one, and *because* I have . . . no one, I'm not all that interested in getting any better.”

I have come to believe that the possibility of wellness in sickness sometimes has to do with who you have around you -- family or friends to help you hear what the doctors are saying, to advocate for you, to remind you often that you are more than just a number in the hospita census.

Sometimes that person can be a complete stranger – an angel, of sorts. Sometimes life provides *little* angels that really humble us on the way to giving us a needed lift. This story is told in the first person by Nancy Burke:

When I was very ill, I had to receive weekly intravenous treatments. This went on for almost two years. Somewhere in the middle I lost my courage. It is hard to say which collapsed first, my soul or my veins, but collapse they both did. One day the search for a healthy vein became too painful.

I pushed the needle away and cried.

The nurse asked to let her introduce me to a young girl of about ten who had lived with cancer all her life and who was also there receiving treatment that day. This child smiled at me and said, “You should have got one of these.”

Lifting her T-shirt she showed me the hole that had been cut into her stomach so that she could receive her treatments through a permanent plastic port. Then she put her hand, small and soft, in mine and said,

“You can take it.”

And I did. (Nancy Burke, Meditations For Health: Thoughts & Quotations On Healing & Wellness)

Do you want to be healed?

Healed. What, in the end, does that mean?

The Sufi poet, Rumi, wrote the following lines:

*Don't turn your head; keep looking at the bandaged place.*

*That's where the light enters you.*

*That’s where the light enters you.*

What dogs you in life? What is unresolved for you; unresolved in a way that sometimes just aches?

Have you had this wound for a long time, maybe? A year? Ten years? Thirty-eight?

Ask yourself the question, why so long? Ask yourself, “Do I want to be healed?”

Amen