

Title – Do you want to be healed? Do you want to be well?

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The God who heals – I remember when I first began to consider who this God was. I was 17 when I went with a friend to visit a person who was very ill. His name was Ian and he was 23 years old. We had agreed to go together – for support - and so that Ian's mom could have a break. I walked into the room and from that moment I was caught up in a story that catapulted me into the question – who is this God who heals, and how does healing happen? The sick room was not an easy place to be. Ian was on very strong medicine, but still in a lot of physical pain; even more, he was wracked with the pain of emotional distress. He would groan when his mother drew near, which made them both feel terrible. He found a few words to tell us that he felt guilty for dying and leaving his mom all alone, that he feared for her, but he really needed to rest. He asked us to pray for peace. So we prayed, a rather desperate and fumbling prayer. Still, as we prayed the furrows of pain on his brow smoothed out, his hands stopped grasping and reaching and his body stilled. His breathing calmed and he slept, for the first time in days, without pain. His mother sighed in relief and held his hand, resting. Peace. Unexplainable peace. I was grateful. In that day I saw a miracle. Even in dying, comfort and life was given – the ability to rest, the ability to trust. How strange it was to me that the place where 'death was in my face' was where I first saw healing happen. And so began my journey that continues to this day of pursuing the God who heals and of making space for others to encounter healing.

Do you want to be well? Who is this God who heals, what is His way and means of healing, what does healing look like?

The word 'healing' has become a catchword within our culture. If you google the word 'healing', 52 million sites will immediately pop up that consider healing in every way imaginable. The concept of healing has taken the place of 'fixing' and the idea that we can do this on our own. There has been an up-surge in the search for healing, something other than ourselves to make all things well; a whole psychological and therapeutic language has grown up around the concept. In our culture, the idea of healing our hurts, healing our brokenness, 'healing this old world' environmentally, politically, etc.' is out there, and it is being pursued.

### **Our God is the God who heals.**

In Exodus 15:26 God announces himself as the God who heals – and the bible is filled with instances of God proclaiming his desire to heal, and encouraging people to humble themselves and ask for healing. The Psalms and the prophets are rich with verses describing the healing and comfort of God, the invitation to turn and be healed by God. Jesus began his ministry by proclaiming that he was anointed by God to bring in the kingdom of God and that it would happen through healing. Luke tells us how Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim the kingdom of God and to heal the sick, giving each one power and authority over all demons, and to cure diseases, so that people would know that through Jesus' life and ministry the Kingdom of God had come to earth. This kingdom would overcome the powers of darkness, and bring once again God's shalom to the whole world by repairing, mending and restoring.

Peace, or Shalom *which* means completeness, wholeness, health, peace, welfare, safety soundness, tranquility, prosperity, perfectness, fullness, rest, harmony, the

absence of agitation or discord, to be complete, perfect and full – how God created the world the world to be – Healing is the connection point between Shalom and Salvation which is described as the act and person who is the means of redeeming and bringing us again the state of being preserved – Shalom once again. Jesus is the person and his life, death and resurrection is the act by which all healing stems and Shalom is restored.

This sermon series is offered with the intent of teaching on the way of healing, and making space in which to encounter the God who heals so that we might know the Shalom of God and offer it to the world around us.

Each Sunday there will be a teaching time of 15-20 minutes on an aspect of healing. This teaching will set the stage and lead into a 15-20 minute time for healing prayers. These prayers will be led so that the whole congregation may receive prayer, with opportunity for those who want further prayer to receive more personal attention from our prayer team.

Next week Monica will be preaching on Spiritual Healing – healing our image of God, and later on she will speak on Physical healing; Tim will preach on Relational Healing; Joy Banks on Emotional Healing – the healing of root memories and false beliefs; I will speak on the final topic of Deliverance and the healing of generational sins. As part of the series, there will be an opportunity to participate in an Inner healing Retreat at Rivendell on the weekend of February 24th, and there will be a Ministering Prayer Service planned for later as well. You will hear more about those two events soon.

But for today, I want to give you a big picture of Healing – one that is big enough to hold our questions, our exploration, our hope.

We have each experienced healing through the created world – healing through doctors, nurses and care-givers who have gifts of healing in their hands, in their learning and in their compassion. We know the healing of time and beauty. Healing through the comfort and companionship of another. Healing that happens through peace-making. In every area of creation, God invests in his work of healing and wholeness. I bless each one of you who are involved in these things. Thank you. God be with you.

And there are more gifts of healing that are available to us through our trust in the God who heals; mending, repairing, restoring gifts that are received through Christ's Spirit. Paul, on his teaching in corinthians speaks about the gift(s) of healing that are available to those who are kingdom of God dwellers; We will hear more about these gifts throughout this series. My prayer has been and continues to be that God would develop more of His healing gifts in each of us and then through us as a people out into our world. For it is the comfort that we receive that is the comfort that we can offer.

As we look at the scripture today, (John 5:1-9a) put yourself in the picture – lying on a mat, somewhere under one of the 5 porticos surrounding the pool, beside others who are sick and broken.

1) The first thing that I want to notice with you is this: Jesus walks right up to the man and seeing his situation asks – do you want to be healed? Do you want to get well? This, my friends, is the nature of God.

We often believe that we have to coax God to listen, to decide to heal; it is up to us to initiate, work harder and provide for our healing or for the healing of the world. This man had made it a way of life for himself, although In Tom Wright's words, the pool at Bethesda was not particularly successful. The place spoke of the possibility of miraculous healing, of the remote chance of divine healing; but it was at best spasmodic, and at worst an idle dream.

One time on our way to Niagara falls, Tim and I picked up a hitchhiker who regaled us with story after incredible story – one of which was how to be healed. He said that if you went out into the back yard during a full moon, and turned a full circle to the right 7 times, prayed your requests, (he did not say who to!) then turned 7 more times but this time to the left, you could be healed. But it all had to be done after digging a hole to a certain depth, on the precise night of the the fullest moon, when a cloud did not cover,. Etc. Etc....

But Jesus walked right up to the man and and having seen him asked, Do you want to be healed? Right to his face. God, sees, God speaks, God acts. From BEFORE the moment when we begin to recognize that God is calling us and inviting us into life in the Kingdom, God loves us and offers us healing. Salvation is the process of spiritual healing in us. God does not wait for us – he makes a way first in Jesus, breaking down every wall of sin and separateness, every act that stands between us and God. His Spirit is always finding us and speaking to us; always yearning and longing over us from the get-go. This is the source of healing in the world. Healing begins and is sourced at the very core of God's love for us.

So it is not that God will not speak, act, or do – it is that we cannot hear, that we are afraid, or that we stumble over the 'what if's' – what if God begins this conversation with me and then walks away? What if He is angry and condemns us for our brokenness? What if God cannot heal? What if in the end it all stays the same? What if I fail? It is surprising to begin to realize that these what-ifs are not from God, they are ours, they are instigated within us by the prince of lies, the ruler of this world whom Jesus went up against in his time here on earth, and defeated on the cross.

In order to understand God's healing, we need to be open to the truth that God – whom Jesus revealed to us in his life on this earth – is not like us, nor is he like the ruler of this world. God is other than what we have known or expect within the limitations and blindness of our brokenness. Get to know God. The source of healing does not come from this world. It comes from the creator, redeemer and restorer of all things. It comes from God and God is love. During these next 6 weeks, ask God's Spirit to reveal to you the Character of Love Itself. You might want to choose a gospel and read through it in order to watch the ways of Jesus so that you can learn the ways of God. Open your spirit to see what you have not noticed before.

2)Secondly, Jesus conveyed to the man that he desired healing for him as well. His simple question – Do you want to get well? was enough to let the man at the pool know that Jesus understood his desire, Jesus desired it also, and now Jesus was giving him an opportunity to respond. It was comforting. Comfort is a first fruit of healing. To be listened to and to feel understood, and that without condemnation; to be held by wholly love gives us an experience and feeling of comfort. It is a sign of God's healing power.

So he responded. He was comforted enough to speak. He accepted the invitation and entered into a dialogue with Jesus.

What conversation does Jesus want to start with you? What conversation has God's Spirit already started with you? What healing does God desire for you? Know that your desire is matched and raised by God who carries it deeply within His own spirit – who longs for your healing as He longs for the healing of the whole world.

However, as you recognize your desire for healing, you may also recognize fear. We are a divided people – we tend to carry both desire and fear at the same time.

What did this man do? He began to tell Jesus how hard it was to get to the water let alone on time. He had waited so long, he had worked so hard at it, and all by himself, because he had no one to help him. He really had tried, (at least at times, I mean when the water stirred, or when it looked to him like something might happen). He had waited so long. His years were flashing by and we think, what more could a person do?

But as I stand back a little further from the scene I notice something more. Wow! This man is talking to the healer! He is talking to the only one who has the power to heal. Jesus has asked him a simple question and This man has been invited to say “Yes! I want to be healed.” But he didn't. He can't quite answer the question. He doesn't want to say no, but he is not quite ready to say yes!

Sometimes we invent ways and means to take the place of God or to justify ourselves - so that we do not have to attend to healing and restoration in our life, or through us to another. We can even want to be healed and not want to be healed all in the same moment. As a friend put it, “this place/situation/hurt might be hell, but at least I'm used to it. I know what it is like”!

Every day for years, I would walk to Queen Victoria to pick up the boys from elementary school, and it became a ritual to spend a little time with a little dog named Bruno. Bruno belonged to Glen, the owner of Figaro's, just across from the school, and he was often outside on the corner waiting for someone to come and play with him. Bruno had a tennis ball that he just loved. Even more, he loved to have someone throw it for him. Unfortunately, the only way that could happen is if Bruno would let go of it. Which Bruno could not do. I could say, 'Bruno, drop it', or grab hold of it to try to pull it away from him, but Bruno would always win. He would growl and pull it away, triumphant in keeping the ball. But then when I would cross the road to continue on, he would lay down, chin on the ball and look at me with sorrowful eyes, wishing that I could stay and throw the ball for him.

We are afraid – of letting go, of losing control, of letting God take over. We are afraid of something new. We are afraid we will feel condemned. Fear and judgment can take many guises, - fear of seeing ourselves for who we really are, fear of other's perception and judgment towards us, fear of a God who might condemn us. It is strange AND true; sometimes we like darkness better than light. This is the power of death in us, the power of this world.

In these next 6 weeks, think about where you desire or need healing, and consider also your fears. Write them down. Have a conversation with Jesus about it. Listen for a response. We need to bring both our desires and our fear into the light of God's comforting spirit who speaks truth to us and leads the way into healing and

transformation. In doing this, we will learn how to have a mind, body and spirit that is softened and ready for more of God's work of healing and transformation.

You may begin to see that healing in one area often directly and/or indirectly will affect other parts of your life and have a carry-on effect within relationships and time.

Lisa was a beautiful young woman with a vibrant and living faith who had become a follower of Christ 10 years earlier, met her husband and after 7 years of marriage was expecting their first child. When she was about 3 months along, she experienced heavy bleeding and was told that she was involved in a miscarriage and that she would lose the baby. In the physical pain and grief of the pending loss, she also carried another burden.

The power of death as it showed itself in the history of her story, in her fear, and in the mis-carriage happening - was all entangled and tied together; and she felt responsible for what was happening in her body. She felt fear and guilt, and believed that this was also how God felt toward her.

With encouragement, and strengthened by the truth that she was already held fast in the love and care of God, she prayed her story - how she felt, what she was afraid of, and how she longed for this baby. She named her fears and asked God to forgive her and release her from the guilt of her past. Then together we prayed that God would release her into the comfort of his love for her that was already there, that already belonged to her. She received His promise and act to forgive her and his faithfulness to carry her guilt away from her - as far as the east is from the west. (God's power to heal stems from the cross, with a life-blood of forgiveness – what we need to hear, what we need to receive, what we need to offer. ) Lisa felt known by God in a way that she had not yet recognized before this prayer, and she knew more of his love and mercy towards her. She felt comforted, and safe, and began to weep softly.

The prayer continued as we asked for Christ's comforting spirit to attend her and bring healing to her baby and her body. We placed Lisa and the baby into the care and keeping of Christ and named our trust in him. And our prayer was spent. We could feel peace around us and Lisa was calm. We rested silently in that peace until a few minutes after the prayer time, when Lisa said, "this is going to sound really strange, but while we were praying I felt my womb become warm - it was hot - and I felt it close - I felt my womb shut". Her healthy baby girl was born 6 months later.

There is more to say here, especially around the now and the not yet of healing. Some brokenness and suffering that we carry will only be fully healed when death is no more. The apostle Paul speaks of this in his own story as he prayed 3 times for unspecified healing around his eyes. What did he receive? Comfort in knowing that God could be all that he needed even with his ailment. I live with an illness and may continue to live with it for some time. Have I prayed for healing? Yes. Have I experienced healing in this? Yes. It has not come the way I first imagined. But I have comfort, I am free from anxiety around what this illness could be, and I am learning a way of life that allows me to live within the limitations of what I experience, and I am learning the ways of grace. God's power of life to heal has met me. I wonder what will happen next!!!!

**Healing always invites us into something new that is about letting go of what is old, or hurting, or separating us from God's kingdom. We are invited to 'let go'**

**of the old and give it into the hands of Jesus, so that he can sort it through, forgive and take away what is no longer needed, then redeem, mend, repair and restore the rest. With healing something new and unknown is going to happen, more goodness than what we can imagine or expect.**

If you are afraid – and I know what it is to be afraid of God's healing and transformative work – I want to give you a prayer to pray whenever it comes to your mind. If you give yourself permission to carry this prayer, then the spirit of God will remind you of it, at the very moment that you need it. “Jesus Christ, son of God, have mercy on me and soften my heart towards who you really are and to your life-giving ways of healing”.

Or you can pray a picture – some of us do visual best! - of a lit candle for you to bring in your imagination to the place where you are afraid, where you have questions, where you cannot see a way. In the way that a flame scatters the darkness, Let this candle be for you the light of Christ pushes our fear away, who stands between us and all that threatens, bringing comfort and peace.

If you have more questions, come and talk. The pastors, myself, and many others in this community have personal experience of our fear, our questions, our suffering being considered and calmed by the light and comfort of God's healing ways.

3) Lastly, I want to look at how God's power to heal works. To do this, let's look at what Jesus said to the man at the pool.

Jesus said, GET UP!! Take up your bed and walk.  
Now this is exciting! Here is where the mystery of God who heals, lives.

The greek word that is translated as 'get up' in this account is the same as what is translated in other places in the new testament as 'resurrect'. So Jesus said to the man, 'Resurrect! Take on the power of life! Take up your mat and walk.

We are used to living the ways of death without even knowing it. I once heard Steve McElroy say that in Indonesia the Prince of this world uses shock and awe to hold people in the power of death, here in western culture he does his best work by blinding us to the hold that death has on us. We are used to hanging our hat on the illusions of the liar; either we are in control and have the ability to make healing happen by ourselves; or else we are a victim to a poverty of life from which we are unable to escape; there is nothing to be done about what separates us, what has hurt us or the powers over us - nothing changing, everything staying the same. Often we carry both illusions at the same time.

Walter Wangerin in his book called Mourning into Dancing says this, “If the gospel (the good news of the kingdom) seems irrelevant to our daily lives, that is our fault, not the Gospel's. For if death is not a daily reality, then Christ's triumph over death is neither daily nor real. Worship and proclamation and even faith itself take on a dream-like, unreal air, and Jesus is reduced to something like a long-term insurance policy, filed and forgotten—whereas he CAN be our necessary ally, an immediate, continuing friend, the Holy Destroyer of Death and the Devil, my own beautiful Savior.”

Healing does not avoid death. Rather it confronts death and defeats it, triumphing over it just as Jesus showed us. By God's power, healing happens at the very

moment and at every moment of death's defeat in our story, bringing resurrection and life to take its place. So much so, that even our physical death cannot keep us from receiving everlasting life. By THIS power of life God is healing and restoring all things. THIS is the power that we are invited to encounter in our life and in the world around us.

I saw this power at Ian's bedside; I saw it when Lisa was released from guilt and fear, and her body physically healed; I have known this power of life in my life, and seen it countless times as people have been released from pain and brokenness and given life in their being. Let me tell you - this healing, it looks like resurrection. It feels like resurrection. It IS resurrection.

Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. His life of confronting death, defeating it by his own death and rising again by the power of God to heal and restore all things makes a way for us.

Where does death have a hold on you? Do you Want to Be Healed? Do you want to get well?

I invite you to take a some moments in silence for reflection and conversation with The Spirit who is here with us. I will put a prayer on the overhead which is based on Paul's prayer in Ephesians 1. This prayer invites God to show you His character, soften your heart toward His power to heal and meet with you in an encounter of healing. Take some time to pray it. And as Communion is served, there will also be three stations available where you are welcome to go and have this prayer spoken over you as a blessing and a shared intent. People will also be in the prayer corner if you desire more time and companionship in specific prayer.

Do you want to be Healed? Our God has the power of Life to heal. Bless His Holy Name.

Benediction

May the Power of God work in you healing and wholeness. May you know His Peace. May it root deeply in you and move through you to bless the world around you. Amen. It shall be so.

Prayer that was on the overhead and was spoken as a blessing at the stations.

**Holy One, You are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Open the eyes of my heart to see You. Give me a softened spirit so that I might know more of the hope that I have in**

You and Your power to heal and restore.

Grow in me the riches of Your resurrection power that is for us who believe, according to the way that YOUR power works. Bring me to a deeper encounter with Your ways of healing and transformation in me and through me to the building up of your kingdom. I ask this for Your Glory, by the power in Your name.

**Amen.**