

Sermon preached at OCC, 25 May 1015

Loving and gracious God, we believe that you are the Lord of all healings by offering peace, comfort and safety that can restore even the deepened ailment of souls. As we explore Jesus' healing story, help us understand the Source of illness and allow us to go with Jesus' ways to be the healing power of all who are in need. Amen.

John 5:1–9

### ***Symptoms or Source: Where Healing Begins***

Last Thursday, we gathered with visiting elders for a mini-retreat titled *Shepherds at Rest – Presence, Prayer, and Joy*. We acknowledged Christ Jesus as our great Shepherd and ourselves as His workers. The purpose of our meeting was to thank all the pastoral visitors and to spend time renewing the purpose behind the Ministry of Presence. It was a lovely afternoon. We sat around tables and read 1 Peter 5:1–4 together, reflecting on Peter's exhortation for elders to care for God's flock willingly and lead by example rather than words. All of us appreciated Peter's message as a powerful model of good leadership.

Pastoral care, as the Ministry of Presence, is something Jesus exemplified in His earthly ministry—visiting people, sitting in their homes, sharing meals, and touching the sick. In doing so, Jesus addressed not only the symptoms of illness but also the source, pointing people back to God and to life in God's love. Today's reading from John 5 reflects the same theme: *Symptoms or Source – Where Healing Begins*.

### ***Symptoms or Source?***

Our reading is set at a pool called Bethzatha (or Bethesda), near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. In ancient Israel, the Sheep Gate was the main entrance for animals brought into the city for temple sacrifices. John tells us that many invalids—blind, lame, and paralysed—lay under the porticos surrounding the pool. He doesn't explain why they were there, but it seems the pool was believed to have healing powers.

Jesus notices a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years and asks, "Do you want to be made well?" Depending on your perspective, this question can sound harsh, insensitive, or even foolish. After all, thirty-eight years is a long time! The question might seem to imply the man had never wanted healing.

Instead of answering directly, the man responds with anguish. He explains that no one had helped him into the pool and that he was never fast enough to get in before others. From this, we understand that he believed the pool had healing power, and he longed to be restored.

Jesus doesn't offer to help him into the water. Instead, He simply says, "Stand up, take your mat, and walk." And the man is healed—his physical symptoms gone. But this is not the end of the story. The man never asked Jesus for healing, and Jesus never mentions faith as a condition for it. This leads us to an important question: Is physical healing the full purpose of Jesus' ministry?

### ***Where Does Healing Begin?***

When Jesus healed the man—something he had longed for over decades—He didn't require or test the man's faith in God. On the surface, faith seems irrelevant to the miracle, and the healing doesn't appear to lead the man to greater faith either. In fact, when questioned by religious authorities for carrying his mat on the Sabbath, he blames Jesus rather than expressing gratitude or loyalty.<sup>1</sup> So, why did Jesus heal him, knowing full well the man's attitude? It suggests that healing from symptoms alone is only part of the process. For the religious leaders, Jesus' act of healing on the Sabbath violated their laws. Yet in John's Gospel, the deeper issue is always spiritual: the sin of unbelief in Jesus as the Son of God. Later, when Jesus finds the man in the temple, He says, "See, you have been made well. Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you."<sup>2</sup> This shows us that healing in Scripture often involves more than physical restoration—it includes spiritual transformation.

Consider the story of Naaman, a Syrian military leader afflicted with leprosy. He is healed only after humbling himself and following Elisha's instruction to dip in the Jordan River seven times. His healing involved obedience and transformation of heart.<sup>3</sup>

Or take the woman who had suffered from haemorrhages for twelve years. Considered unclean and outcast by society, she had spent all she had on doctors to no avail. When she touched Jesus' cloak in faith, she was healed instantly. Jesus commended her faith. Here, healing and faith are deeply connected—faith leads to healing, which in turn deepens faith and self-awareness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> John 5:11-14

<sup>2</sup> John 5:14

<sup>3</sup> 2 Kings 5

<sup>4</sup> Luke 8:43-48

This principle also came through in our children’s story today. We asked: *What did the wise man do to help her become happy again? What was the source of her unhappiness and happiness?* The wise man helped her by making her house chaotic with unnecessary things. When those things were removed, she could see her home with fresh eyes and find contentment. The wise man didn’t change the house itself but changed her perception—he helped her recognise what truly matters.

### ***The Angel of the Waters***

To close, let’s reflect on a symbol of healing in our modern world. On the screen, we see that the sculpture *The Angel of the Waters* sits on Bethesda Terrace in Central Park, New York City. Designed by Emma Stebbins to commemorate the 1842 Croton Aqueduct, it marks a time when freshwater transformed public health in the city. Now, the Croton Aqueduct is no longer in use. Naomi Billingsley – a commentator - notes that the angel at Bethesda Terrace can still symbolize a place of healing and respite in the heart of a bustling city.<sup>5</sup> Just as the original pool of Bethesda was a public space for all people, so too was Jesus’ ministry—reaching out indiscriminately to all conditions and kinds of people.

Whether through our elders in the Ministry of Presence, the wisdom of a story, the waters of Bethesda, or Christ Himself, God’s healing continues. It leads people to faith in God, who is revealed in Christ Jesus – the source of all healings. Even when we fall away, Christ’s work of salvation endures. Let us continue His healing work in our time and space, knowing that this is how we come to live in God’s love and peace in the eternal. Amen.

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<sup>5</sup> Naomi Billingsley, <https://thevcs.org/pool-bethesda#healing-city>