

# Christ the Lord Episcopal Church Pinole, CA

The Sixth Sunday in Easter: May 22, 2022

“Courage to Heal”

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Good morning and welcome to Christ the Lord Church for the sixth Sunday in Easter. I must admit I love today's Gospel reading because it contains so much. Let's delve a little deeper into this story that begins by the Sheep Gate, so it be named. But then our author makes sure we understand exactly where we are when things take place by also using the Hebrew translation.

Beth Zatha whose translation means house or *place of mercy* is located by the market where sheep were sold and was also called the sheep pool. In actuality, archeologists have discovered that besides the use of these pools for cleaning and healing they were also used for ritual purification, the precursor of baptism.

This was not just one pool but a spring-fed reservoir of water with five porches or levels. The spiritual importance is that the pool is spring-fed with geyser-like tendencies that stir up the continuously moving water. "Living water", so to speak, containing minerals and live organisms, rather than a stale pool. This was tumbling, clear, fresh water with a history of healing.

Clean water is healing water, especially in a society where there are no antibiotics or refrigeration and very little medicine. Yet one knew something good was bound to happen if water, clean water, was ingested into the body or surrounded the body.

But we are reminded in our Gospel that people are pushy and self-serving to the point of keeping this blind, lame and possibly paralyzed man from taking his chance to be healed through the water.

So that's how the story reads in the event part of the reading, but what of the teaching, that deeper meaning? I wonder if the "sheep gate" is also a good reference to society as a whole. Are we the sheep who fuss and fight, push and pull to get our turn at the water? Would we be the sheep who didn't even notice the presence of the shepherd right there at the water? So busy trying to heal myself, so busy trying to get my water first, so busy...not just once, but many times passing by our lame and blind man.

I often wondered, what about after they were finished, or possibly healed? Couldn't they turn around and help the poor guy. Really?

But what is interesting is that Jesus just instructs the man to get up and walk. The man never even needed the water. Is this a teaching of the true meaning when Jesus speaks of "living water"? Did Jesus just exchange himself for the purification and healing of living water?

And again, on the Sabbath, which is one of the great sins, per the tradition at that time, and one Jesus commits over and over again. It almost seems like Jesus is trying to get us to think about the Sabbath as a day of compassionate work. There are so many pieces to this story.

Now let's turn our attention to the man being healed. He did have choices. He could have heard what Jesus said and laughed it off with doubt or non-belief. The man could have become angry and defensive about being disturbed, or upset knowing that nothing should be done on the Sabbath. And most of all, to **actually listen** to Jesus after being in your unhealed and diseased state for such a long time, is a very courageous thing to do.

All who hear this story often get fixated on how easily the man just picked up his mat and walked on. Or so we imagine. It doesn't tell us if the man screamed out in pain, or did some kind of changing like you would experience in a special effects movie. We simply know he was healed and walked off.

But this is courageous. This man's life will begin anew. He will now be participating in a society that once shunned him; he will have new opportunities. He may or may not be accepted back into his family (if he has one); but if not, he will now have the opportunity to begin one.

And all that just sounds amazing and we are thrilled for him. However, what I just described is actually a very difficult journey. Hence, many people often get in the way of what Jesus would have them do. Healing shows up in many ways and forms, and can be a scary concept.

Often an opportunity is put before us, one that we know is good, or best, and when looked at contains some real benefits. However, the downfall to choosing an

opportunity, to following a new path, to growing in some new way, is that we have to experience change. Change - something no one really likes.

I say this today because every Christian Sabbath, every Sunday, we are called to reflect on our lives and our relationships and work toward being more like Jesus: called to more compassion, called to more love, called to search for inward peace, as a way to help others around us.

This means we ourselves have to be healed; we ourselves have to move forward in our lives trusting in God and the opportunities put before us. From as simple as changing a diet, or exercise routine, to as complex as a job change, retirement, or physical move, maybe a surgery or treatment that has you nervous. This is when we are called to pick up our mat and walk.

This is when we are called to trust in God, and maybe there will be a primal scream, or what seems like a sci fi physical change that requires some pain, but in the long run, you are walking away healed.

We, God's sheep, are called not to push each other aside, but to help one another look for ways to heal ourselves, each other and creation. We are called to embrace that healing and have the courage to accept the change it will bring into our lives with grace.

We are called today to ask the question, "Do you want to be made well?" no matter what it takes? Amen.