

Sermon for Sunday, May 22, 2022

“Do you want to be healed?”

It’s such an interesting question, isn’t it? If something is wrong with us, of course we’d want to be healed. Why even ask?

But Jesus is the most gracious of teachers. He doesn’t want to have people think he knows what they need. He actually wants them to have the power to say no. even more important, he wants them to have the power to say yes.

This is a familiar pattern in Jesus’ story. He doesn’t make assumptions. He wants those who need him to reach for him, to tell him what they need. That reaching out and asking for his help is a profession of faith, of course. Didn’t we see it with the Canaanite woman who came to Jesus asking for help for her ill daughter? Didn’t we see it with the centurion asking for healing for his child? Didn’t we see it when the blind man asked for his sight?

It begs the question of what we would ask Jesus to heal in us, and what is stopping us for asking for it. He never refuses healing; he simply waits for us to ask for it.

And perhaps we get stuck on what we are willing to admit to ourselves the ways we need healing.

Let’s say I’m stuck in a place of wanting to judge other people, judging whether they’re good or bad people, whether they’re worthy of our kindness, whether they’re right or wrong on a particular issue. I know in my heart that this isn’t congruent with what Jesus teaches. But unless I am willing to admit to myself that this is sin and I need to be healed of that sinful way of thinking, unless I want to be healed, unless I ask Jesus to be healed of this, it’s not going to happen. Of course Jesus knows what is ailing us. But unless we accept the fullness of his healing, turning our back on that thing, we are like a diabetic who refuses to modify her bad dietary habits or an addict refusing to do the hard work of fighting his addiction. Unless we are willing to do the work of living into that healing, there is no point in Jesus healing us without our request or consent.

We all want this parish to be the loving and happy place we imagine it to be. But unless we not only ask Jesus to help us get there but also are willing to admit our own part in the conflict that has caused dissension in this place, why would Jesus do something that will not ultimately solve the problem?

If we refuse to admit our own part out of pride or stubbornness or guilt or shame, we block the possibility of healing – healing of the whole of the community and healing of our own hearts and souls. And that’s why Jesus asks the question “do you want to be healed?” Notice how the person responds: “I have no one to help me get into the pool.” Yes, there are reasons why we may not have been able or willing to ask for Jesus’ help. But here Jesus does not engage on the question of the man’s explanation why he still isn’t healed. He says “get up and do it. You have it within you to be an agent of your own healing.” And what happens next? The fellow gets up, and he walks.

He doesn’t just trust in Jesus’ capacity as a healer, he trusts his own capacity to be an agent of his own healing.

Healing our own brokenness, then, is an act of faith in God, but also an act of faith in our own ability to learn and grow and admit mistakes and change our ways, knowing that Jesus will help us and we must continue to do our own work.

And we do that work not just to heal our own hearts and souls, but to heal the soul of the whole parish.

Standing up. Walking toward Jesus. Saying “Help me in my brokenness.” No excuses or explanation, just “help me.” Trusting that Jesus has put in our hearts the capacity to do the hard work and accepting the responsibility for doing it.

Why? Because of love. Because Jesus loved us first, and loves us still. Because, as we learned last week, that we are OBLIGATED as followers of Jesus Christ to love one another. Even when it’s hard. Even when we have a list of excuses why we don’t want to. I expect the Lord can list a thousand reasons why he shouldn’t love us, though, and yet he does love each and every one of us. In spite of our messiness. In spite of the things we are stuck on. In spite of our egos and our insistence that we should get what we want when we want it, as if we were demanding three year olds. Jesus loves each and every one of us, and he can help us love one another, as he loves us.

If we ask. If we ask. It’s time to ask, before we forget what it means to be church.

And so we pray: Jesus, we need your healing grace. We want to be better. We want to be agents of love and transformation. Help us. Heal us. Give us the strength to do this. Amen.