

## *Healing Water*

Sunday School Lesson

John 5:1-15

May 4, 2025

The author of our lesson today goes from diseased water to healing water to Jesus as healer to modern medicine and ends in concerns for clean water, sanitation, and healthcare. It was a little bit much for me. Many of our gospel stories do not give us details so there is much to be left up to the good storyteller that helps with the story without taking away from it. Rather than try to come up with as many different topics as we can, let's stick to the story and think about what is and is not there.

If you watch *The Chosen*, you may wish to go back to Season Two, Episode Four, to see how they have told the story. Their writers have picked up on the line that the man was crippled for 38 years which may mean that there was an accident when he was a boy the crippled his legs. We see examples when they describe someone as being blind from birth and that language is not used here. So the man knew how to walk as a child then lost that ability at a fairly young age. What would be worse? Never having walked or losing the ability to as a child or teenager?

Let us pray

**O Holy God, transform our lives as we follow you. Give us eyes to see and ears to hear and most of all, hearts that do not judge. Amen.**

Our Purpose Statement: **To affirm that Jesus is the healer who makes us well**

The Pool at Bethsaida was said to have special healing properties. Occasionally, the water in the pool would stir and the one that got into those swirling waters first, was healed. How long had the man been waiting at the pool? We are not given those numbers but we know he had been there a long time. Friends or family members had likely brought him there when they were no longer able to care for him at home.

Those with other ailments and whose legs did work had a better advantage of getting in the pool first. Needless to say, the man was frustrated...and bitter. He had waited a very long time and he was giving up hope. Why did Jesus pick to go to Bethsaida that day and why did he come seeking out that one man? We are not told and perhaps the disciples did not know. *The Chosen* links another disciple, Simon the Zealot, to this one man and while it makes for a compelling and believable story, it is not in the Bible. Jesus did heal on the Sabbath but he healed on other days as well. We have no idea why Jesus singled that day, that location, and that man for a healing but that is not the only thing unique about this story.

We have numerous stories of the healings in the gospel. Most numerous are the blind healings. There is a lengthy story in the 9<sup>th</sup> Chapter John but in Matthew, Jesus heals two blind men after asking if they believed he could heal them. Mark has two blind healings; one at Bethsaida where the man is partially healed and Jesus has to lay

hands on him again and the second is a blind man named Bartimaeus. My favorite is found in Luke where Jesus asks the blind man, "What do you want me to do for you?"

In this story, Jesus asks the man if he wants to get well. How would you answer him? Most of us would give some sort of affirmative answer but not this man. This man had likely never heard of Jesus and had lost what faith he made have had long ago. For this man, healing was not going to come from Jesus; healing was only going to come from someone making sure he got to the swirling water first. Talk about a lack of imagination! He started whining that other always got to the water first. He did not just have paralyzed legs; he had a paralyzed spirit.

Jesus would not leave him there. He told him to get up, pick up his mat, and get out of there. The man obeyed. He must have felt the life return to his legs. It did not matter to him that it was the Sabbath. How petty would it be to tell a man who could walk for the first time in thirty-eight years that he had sinned because he picked up his mat? And yet, that is exactly how the religious leaders responded. Have we been guilty of the same?

### **Scarcity**

The man had a scarcity mentality but so did the religious leaders. Before we condemn them, we need to take a step back and think about why. The religious leaders had been waiting for the promised Messiah for four hundred years. None of them had ever met a real prophet so when John the Baptist appeared on the scene, they did not know how to react to him. They became totally law-dependent. They believed that the Messiah was being delayed because the people were not following all the laws. This was so ingrained in their training and thinking, they could not recognize the Messiah because he was not following their understanding of the law. There was no grace; only the law.

Then, let's look at our man who had suffered without care for 38 years. One person supposedly got healed every year? Every six months? Every three years? Once again, no generosity and no grace. Some Christians still operate in this scarcity mentality because they have never fully excepted the generous grace that Jesus offers. They operate life in a zero sum understanding but that is not the way of God. God's grace is abundance for all.

How would our lives change if we came to understand and live in God's abundance? How would our communities thrive if we understood that pursuing the common good and embracing the grace Jesus offers could change how we work and live together? Jesus offers abundant life.

Let us pray:

**Holy Jesus, our living water, meet us where we are and offer us your life-giving presence and Spirit. May your grace overflow to all we meet this week. Bring your healing and wholeness to our community today. Amen.**