



CHRIST CHURCH CRANBROOK

Do you want to be made well?

I speak to you as a sinner to sinners, as the beloved of God to God's beloved, as one called to bear witness to those called to bear witness. Amen.

As many of you know, a couple of weeks ago, we had the funeral for Amy Ryberg, who was one of the dear people of the parish. Amy was diagnosed with cancer in January and was dead by April. And it was a devastating blow to many of us. As you are processing the grief, there's always those moments where you start to lift up some little funny things that someone did and also some beautiful things that surprised you about them.

And so earlier this week I was talking with Karen Martin, and one of the things that we started to talk about with Amy is she had this breathtaking ability to just utter the most vitriolic political commentary. As soon as she came in, it was like the first thing out of her mouth, right after like how are you doing today, she would just lay it on the line. And it broke every single taboo that you're not supposed to discuss. It was just amazing.

She also had this incredible kind of practice for her Zoom calls. She liked to do her Zoom calls on an iPad and she held the iPad a little bit like a tray while she would just speak straight out. And so you found yourself always looking up at Amy when you're on the Zoom call. She often did like double duty with the Zoom call. I was talking to her son, Ben, and one of the things that she did is she at what point when he was having a conversation with her, she used the iPad for the Zoom call and for her tray for her lunch. And so he was looking at her kind of taking the sandwich off the iPad to eat it. So amazing and such things are we all not made of, these little idiosyncrasies that make us so human and make our lives so precious to others.

But one thing that Amy did, Karen reminded me, is even though she could hold a political position with a kind of impermeable opinion, just very fixed, very inflexible. She had this incredible ability to open up the scriptures. She asked beautiful questions when it came to reading the scriptures and she would begin looking at a piece of scripture by phrasing something in it and saying, "I wonder."

That practice was the way she found her way to Christianity from the Judaism in which she had been raised, because for reasons that are hard to explain, she

bought then a child's Bible that included the New Testament and she was reading the New Testament because she was curious. She wondered. And then she began to ask questions of this Jesus who figures in the New Testament, and to ask of Jesus, a lot of "I wonder" questions.

And it was through that wonder that she was led to this community. And ultimately that she was led to becoming a Christian, to finding Christ. And that was very much part of who she was as well and who she is in God still, she's a person of wonder and she was willing to follow the wonder that she found in the scriptures to their relationship that they have, and we have with Christ. What a blessing she was.

And as I began to think about the sermon for today, and I was reading the gospel assigned for today, I had a kind of "I wonder" moment. Because in today's gospel, there is this moment in which everything is painted for us in ways that Jesus no doubt knew what was happening. He was in the pool called Bethesda, which is Hebrew for *house of kindness*. So He knew He was in this place of compassion. He was surrounded by people who were practicing a kind of ritual of healing. The water in that pool, for reasons that we really don't know, would bubble up, it would become the Greek says "troubled." And there was this ritual of healing where if you had any kind of infirmity, you would plunge yourself into that troubled water in order to find your way to healing.

And of course, as far away as that might seem to us today, all of us know a little bit like what that feels like for us when we go into trouble or sit in the fire in order to find healing. So Jesus knew what was going on. He even seemed to know maybe by observational report that this person, this man, had been waiting for more than 30 years - for close to 40 years to somehow be healed. And yet, Jesus says to him, do you want to be made well? I wonder why Jesus asked that question.

And over the past week I was delving even deeper into that scripture and I realized that the man's answer is kind of bad. When Jesus says, do you want to be made well, He gives this kind of excuse. He kind of just immediately paints himself as a victim. Lord, I've been trying to get to that pool for 38 years, but all these people rush in front of me and I'm just left lying, and that's just the way it is. And yet Jesus works with that answer and says to him, get up, which the Greek is better translated, He says *agere*, wake up. Wake up, take your mat and walk.

And so again, I wonder why Jesus asked the question if He knew the man was not going to give a good answer. If He knew that this was just so beyond his ken, that there would be something bigger in store than just entering troubled water and somehow meeting his Lord. Why did Jesus ask that question when He was

about to say wake up? It would've been much more dramatic to say that. Just put the question aside. Why did Jesus ask that question?

Now, I think I have a part of an answer, which is that when we look at that verse a little more closely and, again, drill a little deeper into the Greek there. We realize that the question that Jesus is asking is much more profound than merely do you want to be cured? Jesus asks, when He says, do you want to be made well, the Greek that He uses for wellness is *hygies*, which is a word that is used to capture not just cure but wholeness, purity, peace, right relationship, restoration, even resurrection. So when Jesus says, do you want to be made well, He doesn't mean just cure, He means something larger at stake in this recovery because all of those things are included in *hygies*.

And when Jesus says, do you want to be made well, the word He uses for made is *genesthai*, which is the same word that is translated to us in multiple ways that are cosmic as well as curative, because when we translate *genesthai* in the scriptures, sometimes it means some kind of moment in history. And so one of the translations into English of this question is, "And it came to pass," which is a kind of way of saying that events conspired in such a way that the ultimate purpose of things emerged. And so we read in the scriptures "And it came to pass that there was a census to be taken in that region." So we read, when we read about Christ's birth, the events conspired, the history unfolded, something emerged that revealed the purpose of everything that drove the holy family to Bethlehem, where it was predicted that Jesus would be born.

Or again, you see *genesthai* when you read the first chapter of John and you read of Jesus, that it was through Him that all things were made and by Him that all things were made, and everything that was made was made through Him, again, that is *genesthai*. And that's meant to convey I think a kind of transformation is at work, a kind of powerful cosmological work is at hand.

So when Jesus says to the man, do you want to be made well, the kind of healing He speaking about is not merely a cure but it's a kind of larger work of healing, such as we read today in revelation where there's a kind of restoration of the city of Jerusalem and everybody is going to Jerusalem, and Jerusalem will no longer be a besieged and dying city crushed by empire, but it will be a place of healing for the nations. And it will be a place where water runs through it. And people are nourished by a fruit that bears fruit in every single month of the year. There'll never be a time in which you won't need and won't be able to have fruit. Fruit will be there, it will be a place of plenty and healing.

And when Jesus says, do you want to become, He's calling attention not just to that momentary encounter, but to the shape of his whole life, because it's through Jesus that all healing comes, because it's through Jesus that all creation came, and it's through Jesus that we are ultimately transformed. So Jesus, when

He invites that man and asks him, do you want to be made well, is inviting him into a larger process of healing, such that we have never been able to fully comprehend.

Now, all of this is important for us to keep in mind, because from the beginning, Christianity has been known as a religion of healing. In fact, in one recent history of healing that I read this past week it was said that part of the reason why people were attracted to Christianity is there was a kind of promise of healing connected to Jesus. And that enabled them to actually get their arms around all the suffering that they were experiencing at that time.

So to a people who were experiencing suffering in terms of the collapsing Roman Empire, to people who were experiencing vandals at the gate, losing their property, the roads collapsing, all the things that were causing anxiety in that time period. When they heard that there was healing possible through Jesus, they flocked to the church and the church did their best to meet their needs. And so the tradition of hospitals in the West came because Christians opened up houses for those who were ill, and monasteries became places where you could find medical treatment and find your healing. And Christianity became known as a community of healing, of people who were healed by being together in Christ.

And at the same time from the beginning, not only was healing central, but it was also clear that healing was multi-dimensional. It didn't just mean a cure and it also involved pulling upon the best knowledge of every day. It didn't mean just a cure because healing and Christianity often meant the hard work of recovery that we know today through the 12-step movement, because healing didn't always happen in the snap of a finger, but actually required a kind of faithful repentance and a kind of discipline and focus on entering that wellness and being transformed by Christ who came to you.

And it was evidence-based even in the most magical seeming things. Today I brought before you, and it's on your bulletin today and we'll put it up here for you to see, an amulet from the fifth and sixth century. And this one's always captured my mind for years, because it is a kind of something that was used to help healing and on it, there is an incision of Jesus and the woman from the gospels of Mark and Luke who touched His robe and had the blood that was flowing from her healed in that moment.

And in that amulet, you also see a little bit of a brief description of that chapter from Mark and Luke, a kind of excision of it. And this was no doubt given to somebody who is struggling with a flow of blood, to a woman. And yet it wasn't merely a magical thing because the artist who created this was careful to carve it out of hematite. And hematite was known in that time period as being a kind of

stone that would actually help women who were experiencing a flow of blood. It was meant to provide relief.

So from the beginning, Christianity not only has had this healing ministry, but has always had a kind of relationship with the best evidence-based practices they knew. And even if we have moved beyond hematite, we still have that same obligation to hold on to every kind of evidence-based healing we know. Because healing is multipurpose. Healing is holistic. It is not just a cure. Do you want to be made well?

Easter is a time for healing. It's a time in which we lift up and hold onto the power of Christ and His love, which is stronger than death, and His life, which is everlasting, and His power to heal us and to be with us through His holy spirit. What does that healing look like for you? Today, I want to just name a couple of things to reinforce what I'm trying to say. And the first is that of course healing is more than a cure, but that doesn't mean we shouldn't pray for a cure. When we pray for a cure, when we pray that someone is delivered from a disease or an injury or anything, we have to keep in mind that that is always an opportunity for us to be humbled and to be faithful.

One of the things that the church discovered is that healing doesn't happen like a transferable skill. Healing is something that is mysterious when it comes to a cure. And everybody who was cured in the scriptures ultimately died. And so at the end, the healing was meant to be not an end in itself, but something greater, for some purpose, often unknown to us. And I know many of you have confronted difficult things in your lives, and I know that many of you have struggled with disease. And I know that many of you have been affected by things which you have prayed fervently for healing. And so I know that this is a difficult task because at the end of the day, we don't always know, and we have no control over what God will do when it comes to a cure.

Sometimes there is something which evades our understanding. And sometimes there are moments in which nature runs its course. And one of the things that I want you to do is to continue that ministry of praying for those who are sick, because the change that happens is not just in the physical nature of what's going on, but often in the healing that happens in the midst of it, and the community we become through it. And the way that Christ is working in all things to bring about His redemption.

In 2020, shortly after the pandemic struck, one of the members of this parish was infected with COVID 19, and he also was suffering from a recurrence of his cancer. And so I prayed for healing for him every single day. And I called him every single day and I talked to his spouse every single day for three months. And he recovered almost miraculously before the advent of the vaccine, before anything that we knew about the disease was known, and it was, to me, almost a

miracle. But of course there are so many others who were lost to this disease, and so many have been prayed for. And the work we have to do as Christians, when it comes to a cure is to be faithful and humble and to let God be God, and to recognize that there are things that evade our understanding.

The second thing I want you to know is that healing is not an end in itself when it comes to the cure, but participates somehow in Christ's death and resurrection. When you look at all of the New Testament experiences of the healing that Jesus does, these are always a kind of sign that point to the greater healing that Jesus is bringing through His death and resurrection. And the healing that you and I have been called to is not simply to have physical prosperity on this earth, but to see our lives in their totality, our life and death in the context of this greater work of redemption that Christ is doing.

So for those of us who are struggling to trust God, Jesus comes to us and not only says, do you want to be made well, but wake up, take a risk on Christ, lean into Him, trust in His work of healing in this world. Trust that His healing will be sufficient for you. Trust that we can be as the early church was, a healing community, supporting each other, no matter what healing looks for each of us.

And the final thing I want to point out is something that is a final fold in this passage today, which still fills me with wonder. And that is that after healing the man, the man never goes into the troubled water. And that to me is its own kind of sign of what Jesus has done in His death and resurrection. The man does not enter the trouble water because Jesus entered that troubled water for him. And for those of you who find yourself in troubled water, for those of you who have tried again and again to somehow recover, for those of you who have been disappointed and dejected, know this: Jesus has entered that troubled water called death so that you would have life and life everlasting all through is love.

Amen.