

May 9, 2010
Easter 6 Year C

Acts 16:8-15
Psalm 67
Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5
John 5:1-9

This past weekend at the Annual Gathering, I attended a workshop on behavior covenants in congregations, and we worked with a case study where one of the things that was going on was a “whispering campaign” – you know what those are, they’re like the “Parking Lot Meetings”, the meetings after the meetings, where people say what they were afraid to say in public. One of the women in my study group declared, very assuredly that “Only the Devil whispers”. I strongly disagreed, and since I had already disagreed with her several times, I kept my mouth shut, but I thought, “Oh, no! God’s spirit whispers, too!”

In January of 2009, on a particularly cold, miserable morning, I was washing my face. And as I put that warm, moist washcloth on my cold face, I heard the Spirit whisper, “Remember your baptism.” And I thought, “That’s odd.” But on a morning when I was having trouble mustering up a whole lot of love for myself, it was a powerful reminder of God’s love for me. On! That’s right. God loves me even when I don’t love myself. And it made me think of the title of a book I have still not read, but whose title, to me, is a lesson in itself. It’s called *A Glimpse of Jesus: A Stranger to Self-hatred*. It speaks to me about Jesus’ relationship with God: that because Jesus loved and **trusted** God completely, fully, he loved himself, and recognized in himself the gift of God. And when he gave his life for us it was out of love for us, NOT because he hated himself.

You know, lots of people give and give and give, but mostly because they hate themselves, they think everyone else deserves more than they do. It’s like a martyr’s complex, you know, the ultimate Mother’s Day joke. How many mothers does it take to screw in a light bulb? None. That’s okay, never mind, I’ll just sit here in the dark...” So many of us are mad at the world, sad about our lives, stuck in bad places and bad relationships because deep down, at our core, we do not love ourselves enough to let God heal us.

I have always been struck by the question Jesus asks the man at Bethzatha. Do you want to be healed? For heaven’s sake! The man had been ill for 38 years. Why go to the pool every day if he didn’t want to be healed? But I wonder if maybe, deep down inside, he didn’t think he was worthy of being healed. Or if he was afraid to be healed, and that’s why somehow, someone else always beat him to the pool.

To be healed requires us to do something different that what we are doing now. Lots of people to and through churches looking for help – they want me to fix their partner, their child, to make them happy, to take care of financial emergencies (which most frequently are consequences of bad choices). And I *want* to help when I can. But more often than not I often think of Jesus question: Do you **WANT** to be healed? Being healed, being well, being whole takes work. Do you *want* to look at your responsibility

in this relationship? Do you want to discipline your child and are you ready to have them be angry with you for it? Are you willing to change your diet, get more exercise, quite smoking? Do you want to really rest, to turn off the phone, the computer, the tv and just **be**, to be alone with yourself, to be present with someone you love? Do you want to get rid of your illusions, the lies you tell yourself? Do you want to release resentment, bitterness, self-pity, self-hatred? Will you pick up your cushion and walk? To be healed takes away all our excuses for hating ourselves.

Healing requires us to do something different than what we are doing now. Most humans live with the motto “Better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.” It doesn’t make us *happy*, but it’s what we choose.

It occurred to me this week that life is about how you handle the things that get in your way, the things that stop you from the path you thought you were going to take. Do you let them stop you? Do you pretend they’re not there but keep banging your head against them? Do you get angry, blame someone, anyone else? Do you recognize them, adjust and move on? It’s harder than it sounds!

And it’s interesting to me that in John’s story,, the healing power is in the water *only* when it is “troubled” – not when it is calm and still. The Elder John sees the redeemed city fed, not by calm pools or deep wells, but by moving streams of water. In fact, John’s whole image of the New City, the redeemed, transformed city is one where there are floods of water and light,¹ not like the devastation we saw in spring or what folks in the South are experiencing now, but floods that are like the reviving rains in the desert or a warm shower in the morning, floods that break over us with delight and joy, floods that turn the world as we know, expect it, upside down, floods of blessings, gifts and healing.

Sometimes people come to church because they want to be closer to God. And John’s vision (because I believe John was speaking to the needs of his congregations more than he was acting as a fortune teller about some unknown end time), John’s vision is a reminder that we are invited to live in a world here and now where God doesn’t simply dwell in a Temple, but God’s presence floods the world and we are transformed and healed by looking for God’s presence and activity in every moment and every area of our lives.

And what is true of us as persons is also true of us as congregations. You may remember that when I preached my candidating sermon here I told you that I could not, would not promise to make you grow, but that I would do my best to help you be as healthy a congregation as possible. And you cannot be healthy, you cannot be healed without forgiveness, without releasing our dis-ease.

¹ This idea and images in the rest of the paragraph from Jana Norman and Paul Turley, *Awaken: the Art of Imaginative Preaching*, Lent-Easter, 2007, Year C. (Inner Grove Heights, MN: Logos Productions, Inc.) 2007, p.51

In my first year we had conversations about the life and history of the church and I asked folks to identify good times and bad times in the life of the congregation. And those were different for different people, depending on how long they had been here at FUBC. I'm going to ask you to think about that time again. If you are new to the congregation or a visitor here with us this morning, think about a bad time you experienced in another church. Think about that time. Remember how it felt.

What was changed in that time, in those events?

What was lost?

What was gained?

Who was a person who was hurt in that time, by those events? It may be you, it may be someone else. Have they been healed? Pray for that person's healing.

Who was the person you feel was "responsible" in or for this bad time? Pray for that person's healing.

How was God active, present in that time?

What blessings, what gifts were poured out on the congregation, or bubbled up from hidden springs? What healing was found in those troubled waters?

This week when you are angry, or hurt, or frightened by troubled waters, ask yourself, "Do I *want* to be healed?" And remind yourself of the waters of life – drink a tall, cool glass of water, splash your face with warm water, float in a pool, let the shower pour over you, soak in the tub, do something that reminds you of the flood of blessings God pours out on you.² And remember that the healing which is not a magic cure, but the miracle of God's live-giving presence is *with you and* for you, now and always. Amen.

² *Ibid.*