

Sermon Sunday of the Paralytic

In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit:
CHRIST IS RISEN !!!

Today, in the Gospel we encounter a man in need of healing. He had been paralyzed for 38 years. He had fallen into despair. He had given up. He wanted to be healed, yet he had a story of why he could not be healed. And his story was legitimate. He could not get to the water. He could not see a way out of things being the way they had always been.

Healing: We often think of healing as a “solution to problems”. As anyone who has worked in software development knows, when you solve one problem you often create others.

Many of us need to be healed; and we all have our story about why we have not been healed. There is a sense that we’ve all been paralyzed this last couple of years. . . paralyzed fighting a pandemic that has required us to keep to ourselves, to be isolated. . . . paralyzed by our own fears and those who want to exploit our fears. Now, though deaths are way down, infections are still increasing. Yet we have found it OK for the time being to relax our mask mandates. We have we to be together . . . yet we find that the isolation has wounded us. Do we want to be healed?

This paralytic was married to his story. He has lain daily by the pool for 38 years. 38 years of having to eke by a minimal existence by begging, 38 years of being paralyzed, 38 years of surviving life.

Even though it has been hard he has made it these 38 years.

He could not entertain the possibility that someone was there Who could pull him out of his story – Who could change his story by His Word.

Jesus asks “Do you want to be healed?”

Jesus does not violate our boundaries. Jesus does not manipulate. Jesus invites; Jesus asks. Surviving life after 38 years of being paralyzed, he says: “I have no man.” He doesn’t yet know that the Man he seeks is standing in front of him – the God-man who asks him this simple but difficult question. Tuesday Vespers we will hear how the Church understands Christ as a response to this:

For thee, I became man; for thee I am clothed in the flesh; yet sayest thou to me ‘I have no man’. Arise take up thy bed and walk.

And so God in the flesh as a man asks him: Do you want to be healed?

This is not quite so obvious a question as it may appear on the surface. What will being healed mean to this man? It will mean a drastic change in his life. He will now need to work for a living. His life, as he knew it would be over. He would have to start a new life at an age when most had settled into a stable life. He would have to leave many of his friends who also lived daily with many forms of incapacity. They would still be his friends, but he would no longer see them daily. Healing for him will cost him many of his daily comforts. Healing for him means that his survival skills, honed over 38 years, no longer have any meaning.

He must develop new skills at an older age. He doesn't even know how to answer Jesus' question; instead he gives Him a reason why he is not healed.

And yet Jesus asks him: Do you want to be healed?

Jesus does not address his story, but heals him by His Word.

And as a healed man he encounters people who have no interest in his healing – people who are toxic to his spiritual health. For him the scribes and pharisees come asking the wrong question: Instead of asking “who healed you?”, they asked “who bid you carry your pallet?” Rather than rejoice in his healing, they chose to take offense. And by their taking offense they erect a wall between themselves and God.

We live in a world that is paralyzed. We are paralyzed by many things – mainly Fear and Greed. We move slowly towards our own doom and do little or nothing to prevent it. Instead, we plot ways that we can move to our doom faster: wars, get rich schemes, justifying our hatred, our corruption, our addiction to drama, putting our fellow humans at risk so that we can sell more death. Do we want to be healed?

As the Kontakion tells us: we need Christ to raise up our soul that is paralyzed. Do we want to be healed? We also are in need of healing.

Well of course we want to be healed. But just as this was not a simple question for the Paralytic, it is not a simple question for us. Jesus looks at our wounds and seeks to heal us. For some of us, we do not know ourselves well enough to even know the depths

of our wounds. For others of us, we know our wounds well. — Like the paralytic we have developed survival strategies that help us get through our life. Our survival strategies work — that is, they help us get through. To be healed of our wounds means that we must develop new strategies for life. But our old strategies worked. Giving them up feels like we are giving up survival. So we hold on to them.

Jesus asks us: Do you want to be healed?

How are we paralyzed? What has us stuck? How are we like this man's **blind** friends — not able to see what we need to see? Where are we committed to our story to such a point that we don't see healing when it comes to us? Where are we letting this keep us paralyzed?

Do we want to be healed?

Just as this man encountered toxic people, so we will encounter people who are uncomfortable with us being healed. They too have developed survival strategies. Our healing puts a monkey wrench into their smooth way of getting through life. They would rather we still be paralyzed; they know how to handle us when we are paralyzed. Our healing means that their way of life must change too. They will do their best to keep us in our place — not because they are mean, evil people, but because our healing means their lives change too. And as much as we need to change and to heal, we do not like change, and they do not like change.

Yet Jesus asks: Do you want to be healed?

And this question, at this time of the year, when Healing has broken through for all mankind, is a question to which we must address ourselves. CHRIST IS RISEN!!! Will we remain in our self made graves? He seeks to heal our wounds. CHRIST IS RISEN !!! He bids us rise with Him. He bids us answer His question, “YES!”, and not give Him the story we know so well of why it has not happened: “we have no man...” As St. John Chrysostom said: “Where once infirmity was a hindrance to those who desired to be healed, now each person has the power to approach, because now it’s not an Angel who troubles the waters, it’s the Lord of the Angels who does everything.” Behold, the God-man has come to us and asks: Do you want to be healed?

Yet Jesus bids us: Arise, take up thy pallet, and walk. – Arise with He Who IS RISEN. . . . And take up our Cross, . . . and follow Him: to Whom be all glory honour and worship, now and ever and unto ages of ages. Amen

CHRIST IS RISEN!!