



## Small group questions

*New wine: new covenant – John 5:1-18*

Leaders: Read the passage aloud together first and then explore any of the following questions as a way to deepen your community in Christ.

1. This is the third sermon in the series of 7 Signs From John's Gospel. Review the first two signs (the Wedding at Cana and the healing of the official's son) and consider what John 5:1-18 might have in common. What do they point to about the Person of Jesus Christ?
2. Seeking healing is a basic human instinct. How do you see our culture and/or people locally seeking healing or ways to eliminate/reduce the pain in their lives? How can we show compassion to them and to one another?
3. Why do you think Jesus chose to stop by the pool of Bethesda before going to the Temple for the Jewish Feast?
4. C.S. Lewis said that, "We can ignore even pleasure. But pain *insists* upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world." Southern Catholic fiction writer Flannery O'Connor—who suffered from lupus and died at age 39—wrote, "I have never been anywhere but sick. In a sense sickness is a place, more instructive than a long trip to Europe, and it's always a place where nobody can follow. Sickness before death is a very appropriate thing and I think those who don't have it miss one of God's mercies." Lewis and O'Connor both saw pain as a "gift", a means to move them to God and transform their faith. How do their insights resonate with you? How can pain be a gift?
5. Why do you think Christ asked the man who'd been an invalid for 38 years, "Do you want to be well?"
6. What happens when the man answers Christ? Why do you think Christ then gives him an impossible command, "Rise, take up your mat and walk"?
7. When Christ heals this man on the Sabbath he breaks the Sabbath laws, at least according to the Jewish leaders. What was the Sabbath really intended for and how does Christ fulfil it here?
8. By healing this man on the Sabbath, Christ creates enemies. Then he goes further and finds the once-paralysed man to remind him he's well and to stop sinning, revealing his authority over both sin and sickness. Why do both create "problems" for the religious leaders? How is this "God" a problem for them?
9. The key passage in this story is Christ's response to the leaders in V. 17 & 18. Why does his equality with God upset them? How does it affect you?
10. Since the beginning of human history, God has promised good for his people. How does this story reinforce that truth and reality? How does Christ absorb suffering bring us good? How does this influence how we live each day? Review Isaiah 61 as a final reminder of God's authority and call to us!

*Pray for one another that God might be near us in our pain and make us more like Christ, compassionate, always seeking the glory of our Father in Heaven. Pray also that we'll be people who obey Christ's commands and walk in his ways!*

**Date:** 19 March 2017

**Service/s:** 730, 930 (T)

**Series :** 7 signs of John's Gospel

**Passage:** John 5:1-5

**Title:** **Jesus: Equal with God**

**Aim:** To reveal Christ as the exact representation of his Father, full of grace and compassion, and authority to heal and forgive.

**Preacher:** **Jo Kadlecek**

Right after the women's retreat last month, I was walking around Montville with Teresa, our guest speaker. When she went into one of the shops, I waited outside. That's when I noticed a shop with a sign in the window for a clairvoyant who offered psychic therapy, spiritual and physical healing and energy channeling. I was kind of amazed that this clairvoyant thought he could offer so much healing in one place.

But the more I thought about it, the more I realized he was addressing—however misguided—one of our deepest desires as humans: to live without pain.

In fact, drive anywhere on the Sunshine Coast and you'll find loads of herbalists, chemists, physios, and specialists in everything from natural medicines and energy foods to ancient treatments and state of the art hospitals.

We live in a time when healing practices, drug companies, and medical research have never been more able to address so many aches and pains. Broken bodies and broken souls are business opportunities for some and noble professions and services for others.

So here we are in John 5 at Bethesda, which means the house of mercy, where pain and suffering reveal this same human instinct for healing. These folks are so desperate they think if they can just get in when the water stirs, *maybe* a miracle will happen. Maybe their ailments—and the loneliness, poverty that comes with sickness—will finally go away. And they'll be normal.

Maybe. In our series of 7 Signs in John's Gospel, we're learning how the miraculous deeds Jesus performs point to something else, a greater truth and reality than what's seen in the moment. First, Mark showed us that when Jesus turned water into wine at a wedding, he was pointing to the eternal feast that waits for those of us who believe. Last week, Simon showed us how Christ's *word* could heal an Official's son, a sign that the One who spoke creation into existence cares about each part of our lives. Now, we find Jesus in Jerusalem for a Jewish feast, but not before first stopping by a place where, as John describes it, "a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, lame and paralyzed."

It's a story that points to a lot about Our Lord and what it means to follow Him, but I want to focus on three things: **(PP)**

1. The *Gift of Pain* **(PP)**
2. The "Problem" of God, and **(PP)**
3. The Promise of Good.

**First, the gift of pain. (PP)** If we have any ounce of compassion for other people, the last thing we ever want to see is someone hurting, let alone a place where there are a 'great number of sick people'. Or to feel pain ourselves. Suffering is awful. It breaks our hearts, and challenges our hopes. Why then does pain exist at all? What's the point?

C.S. Lewis **(PP)** famously said that, “**(PP)** We can ignore even pleasure. But pain *insists* upon being attended to. God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.” “**(PP)**

Southern Catholic fiction writer Flannery O’Connor—who suffered from lupus and died at age 39**(PP)**—wrote, **(PP)** “I have never been anywhere but sick. In a sense sickness is a place, more instructive than a long trip to Europe, and it’s always a place where nobody can follow. Sickness before death is a very appropriate thing and I think those who don’t have it miss one of God’s mercies.”

To Lewis and O’Connor, pain moved them toward God. They believed that with God’s help suffering was a mercy & a megaphone to transform them. “**(PP)** When a missionary doctor in India went to work with Lepers, he soon realized the disease of leprosy wasn’t what killed them; it was the infections they got whenever they put their hand into a fire to pull out a pot, or when they stepped on a nail. See, leprosy *kills the nerve endings* and so the warnings to the brain—*ouch, danger, something is wrong*—don’t get sent. Dr. Brand even said once if he could give his leprosy patients *anything*, it’d be the gift of pain so they would know when their body was in trouble.

Pain *does* motivate us. And what we *do with* our pain can either shape us or define us. It can be a guide that tells us something is wrong and moves us to Jesus, making us more compassionate toward others. Or we can be so absorbed by it that it controls us and we miss its reminder that we’re alive.

So no wonder John shows us a *great number* of disabled people at the pools of Bethsaida. They’ve heard that an Angel from God sometimes stirs the waters and heals in the process.

Of all the people there, Jesus singles out this one paralysed man, an invalid for 38 years, which was longer than most stayed alive in those days. This man’s pain *drives* him to this place known only for the *possibility* of healing.—the same reason many of us come to church.

Then, Jesus asks him this funny question, “Do you want to get well?” **(PP)** It’s not a trick question, but it sure is probing, isn’t it? Jesus sees the man’s suffering and responds to the man’s need—in fact, *nothing but his suffering* gets Jesus’s attention here. Not his piety or his involvement in church or anything but only his desperate state.

That’s what Jesus notices. And Jesus asks, not because he doesn’t know, but b/c he wants to hear the man’s heart, to see if *he wants* . . . change.

Sometimes, we can get so familiar with our pain that the idea of anything different can scare us or paralyse us. So we stay stuck. *This* man’s pain, though, is a gift because it moves him in the right direction: “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.” It’s not an excuse; he’s just being honest. And he doesn’t even know who’s asking the question.

Notice Jesus’ response: he doesn’t say, ah, tough luck, mate. Or, hang on, let me at least get you more comfortable. Or even, well, just keep trying, I’m sure you’ll get there eventually.

No, Jesus gives this man—who hasn’t walked for 38 years—an *impossible* command: “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” Jesus doesn’t say, get up and we’ll try to carry you. He says walk. And John tells us, “At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.”

In other words, the *man's focus moves from his own pain and inability* to Jesus and his power.

Though Jesus is a stranger to the man, something in the Lord's voice is so irresistible, so compassionate, that he obeys. He doesn't even leave his mat on the ground—just in case it doesn't work—but simply does what Jesus says. And then he *walks* straight out of Bethsaida and into the temple.

But his movement brings us to **The "Problem" of God. (PP)** as the question of "Who is this Man?" makes the rounds. **(PP)**

Now 1/5 of all the material in the Gospels deals with physical healings. It's obviously part of Christ's ministry and reveals his desire for our good. But Jesus is *not* just another healer. By performing *this* miracle with a mere word, he shows he is much more than your typical rabbi. That he chooses to heal on a day most call sacred: the Sabbath, says he's different. What rabbi in his right mind would break the religious law by *working and* healing a crippled man? Uh oh.

John takes us next to the Jewish leaders who reprimand the healed man, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

Really? I don't know about you but I just want to shake these guys and say, Are you kidding me? This guy hasn't walked for 38 years and you're going to criminalize him for carrying his mat?! Besides, he wasn't actually violating the Sabbath; Jewish leaders had added so many rules about work over the years that they'd lost sight of the Sabbath's original purpose: restoration!

Obviously, something bigger is going on. By obeying Jesus—whom he doesn't even know—the man is no longer consumed by his own suffering; in fact, it's the first time in a long time he has something else to worry about besides his health! And when he admits that he was no idea who it is who heals him, the problems grow. The local authorities are furious, the man is in a new kind of able-bodied trouble, and Jesus is nowhere to be seen.

Some of us might be thinking, well, *shouldn't* Jesus have obeyed the laws of religion? Shouldn't he have made things safe and cosy for the man he healed? And come to think of it, shouldn't he have healed *all* those folks at the pools?

Then, when Jesus does turn up again and finds the once-paralysed man—for the second time—we're faced with another problem: **(PP)** "See, you are well again," Christ says to him. "Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

He's not creating a theology that says our sin brings on disease or sickness. Yes, sin has consequences. But John only tells us about the man's ailment, not his sin. The fact that Jesus now addresses sin points to a greater truth and power about him. And that's the real problem. Because **ONLY** God Almighty has the authority to heal AND forgive sin.

In other words, Jesus is healer and forgiver, the only true restorer of both broken hearts and broken bodies. As one commentator says **(PP)**, “Healing and forgiveness belong together, for the work of Jesus is an attack upon the whole power of evil which manifests itself both in sickness and in sin.”

The first thing the man does after Jesus tells him not to sin? He finds the Jewish leaders and tells them who healed him. Because our salvation is never just about us! It always takes us to others.

In this case, though, it’s not good news to the Jewish leaders because they begin to plot to kill Christ. So Jesus shakes things up—again: Look at v. 17 and 18: **(PP)** “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” 18 For this reason they tried all the more to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.”

*Equal with God?* Well, *that* would explain the healing. As well as the forgiveness and the unusual choices Jesus makes. To the Jews, though, this is blasphemy. And so, to them, the *problem* of this God is he *can’t* be God. He is not the kind of God they think he should be.

And I’m guessing many of us, too, want God to be a certain way. Shouldn’t he do a little better at eliminating pain and suffering? Shouldn’t he solve all the conflicts of the world, or at least in our church? Make our lives always comfortable and easy?

No. God Incarnate is far bigger than our tiny perceptions of who he is. The minute we begin to think he should do things this way or that means we’re more interested in *being* God than in obeying him. Or in submitting to his Sovereignty. When we’re honest, we want to control our own lives. Pain shows us we can’t.

In fact, the God of John’s Gospel, this Jesus who claims equality with his Father, does far more than any of us would ever imagine: he absorbs suffering, first in the persecution from the religious leaders, and ultimately on the cross.

Only when we recognize God for who he is—and Jesus as the exact representation of the Father—can we ever see pain as a gift from the One who has always and only promised our Good.

So **(PP)** pain signals something is wrong and that we’re not in control.

**(PP)** Healing signals something—and someone—better.

**(PP)** And both signal God’s promise for Good from the beginning.

God has always promised salvation from our broken world and our broken lives. He has always had our good in mind, as Jesus does with this man in John 5. How do we know?

Because Jesus chose to take on this man’s pain—and all of ours—to give new life.

If he endured such excruciating prayer in the garden for what he was about to experience that he sweated blood;

if he endured the devastating alienation from his father, by absorbing the sins and suffering of the entire history of humankind, so that we could be free to live;

if he *chose* to obey God by enduring so much more pain than we'll ever know put together, we have to ask why?

What motivated him? You. Me. Love. The Father's love sustained him and the promise of resurrected life anchored him. He knew what he had to do, the pain he was called to experience to bring us back to God. For the joy that was set before him, he endured the cross, despising the shame and sat down at the right hand of his father. Reunited. We're all trying to get rid of our pain but Jesus willingly took it on. For us.

**The promise of God's goodness**, then, is that we don't have some hit or miss clairvoyant helper, or an abstract spirituality in the universe. We have the Promised fulfilment, **(PP)** The Spirit of the Lord God Himself, who anointed Jesus to bring good news to the poor, sent to bind up the broken-hearted and to proclaim liberty to the captives.

Is Jesus your God this morning?

The One who claimed equality, who goes on in vs 20,21, to say, *For the Father loves the Son and shows him all he does. Yes, and he will show him even greater works than these, so that you will be amazed. 21 For just as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, even so the Son gives life to whom he is pleased to give it.* This Jesus, who is equal with God, IS our Promise of Good, and He invites each of us today to bring own hurts to Him, to exchange our pain for His hope and new Life. He seeks us out time and again, forgives us our sins and sends us out to be his body, broken for others, caring for those in needs, proclaiming liberty in Jesus!

So when we draw near to Him, when we obey his irresistible voice no matter how we feel, *he transforms our hearts, and in the process, enables us to hold on* to that promise of our eternal home, where all pain and suffering will disappear.

May we hear his voice this morning saying, rise, take up your mat, and walk. And then go tell others just who it is who brings us new life. Amen.