

*Holy God, send Your Word, send Your Spirit, send Your love. Amen.*

Being a water person, I love how there’s water in all our readings today – in the Gospel, of course, there’s that pool of healing water. In Acts there’s that riverbank outside Philippi, a place of prayer to which Paul and Luke and their friends go to meet people. If you want to start a ministry – go to where people are praying. And by that river they meet Lydia, a businesswoman who comes to believe in Jesus through what they tell her, and has her whole household baptized. Imagine how many lives were influenced through that one conversation.

We could have a whole sermon about Lydia, but not today.

There’s another river, in the reading from Revelation, which we did not hear.

It tells of a river of life that flows from the throne of God. Listen:

*Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

The healing of the nations. God’s healing is for everyone and everything.

And that river, friends, is already flowing. It is God’s life, Christ’s risen life, which comes to us through the Holy Spirit, and it flows through us to every place and person in need of healing and restoration.

I came to see God’s healing as a river, a stream,

because I had a friend who did not believe in praying for healing.

To him, the thought that sometimes people are healed and sometimes not, was reason enough to never pray for it. What kind of God does that?

Well, our kind of God desires wholeness for every person, for this whole world.

Healing is always God’s will. And it’s a mysterious interaction of God’s power and human faith. Where no faith is exercised, we rarely see healing occur.

For whatever reason, God has chosen to work through us.

I came to understand that God’s healing is not from outside, not a favor we need to beg for. It is a gift we’ve already received, which needs to be released in us, and in those for whom we pray. That river is already flowing from God’s throne. We need to step into that stream, to let it flow in and through us.

Now, there can be obstacles to the free flow of that healing stream. Part of our work is identifying the obstacles and praying them away. Agnes Sanford, one of the great healing ministers of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, likened that flow to electricity. She said, If you turn on a lamp and it doesn't work, you don't say, "I don't believe in electricity." You find what is blocking the current's flow. Is the bulb screwed in? Does it need replacing? Is the lamp plugged in?

So it is with us – we don't have to beg God for healing. We invite God to release the healing love and power already given to us by virtue of Christ in us. And when we don't experience it, we look for where the current is impeded. That's called repentance. All kinds of things can impede the healing stream – resentment, fear of disappointment, inability to forgive or accept forgiveness, unhealed traumas buried deep, shame, conflicts with others, anger... As we surface these, we invite that stream to bear them away.

Another one of the great healing ministers of recent times was an Australian Anglican priest named Jim Glennon, who had particularly strong gift of healing. Which he said was simply a gift of great faith, faith to believe in God's power. He offered a healing service on Wednesday nights at the Cathedral in Sydney, that soon drew hundreds more than the Sunday morning services. His approach to healing was to plant the seed of faith, invite God's healing, trust that God's desire is for us to be whole, and then give thanks expectantly, as we start to see the healing occur, whether that's in minutes or months. I've done this – as symptoms lessen, I say, "Thank you, God, I know you are healing me." Soon enough it's completed. I've prayed away heel spurs, burns, colds.

I got to know Jim before he died, and had him come do a healing mission at my church in New York. The connection between healing and forgiveness became even clearer. After teaching about the prayer of faith, Jim asked if anyone with severe back pain would come up for prayer, and a man did. Jim invited anyone else who wanted to come up to join in the laying on of hands, and many of us did. Then he prayed, simply, briefly, then he asked the man if he had any experience as we prayed. The man said, "It's weird – I keep seeing my old boss's face." He told us his back injury had been due to a workplace accident, and his boss had stiffed him on workman's comp and ultimately let him go.

Needless to say, he had a lot of anger toward this man. Jim asked, "Can you forgive him?" He didn't push, just asked, and the man thought, and then said, "Yes. I guess I can," and tears were streaming down his face. Then we prayed some more, and Jim asked again, "What are you feeling?" "The pain is gone!" the man said. "It's gone! It's been with me for 15 years, and it's gone!" "Well, twist around," Jim said. "Move your back. Try it out. Get up and walk." One way we accept the healing is by moving into it.

*Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk."*

*At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.*

Where do you desire to be healed? Maybe like the man in our gospel story, you've lived with a physical or emotional or life condition that blocks out joy, that keeps you from living your fullest, richest life. Maybe even for 38 years. And maybe, like that man, you have all kinds of reasons healing has not occurred.

*"I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me."*

"I've always been like this." "I deserve to be like this."

"God has more important things to do than heal me." I've heard it all. And let me tell you with confidence: no one is more precious to God than you are. Nothing is more important to God than you being the fullest, most joyful and authentic you you can possibly be. God made you in love, for joy. God has gifted you and wants you to realize your purpose in life. God wants you whole.

What obstacles might impede the flow of God's healing stream in you?

What stories have you been told or told yourself that hold you back?

Are you willing to release them?

Are you willing to tell Jesus, "Yes, I want to be made well."

In a few minutes we're going to pray as a group for healing –

you won't have to pray aloud; I'll do that, but we will cluster in groups.

But first, Alicia and I are going to sing a song. You can join if you want,

but I invite you just to sit and let it wash over you,

and pray about what you'd like healed in you, and what might be in the way.

This will be the prayer before the prayer, as we invite the Holy Spirit to move.

Song: [\*I Can Hear Your Voice\*](#), Michael W. Smith

### John 5:1-9

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath.

### Acts 16:9-16

During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, “Come over to Macedonia and help us.” When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them. We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, “If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home.” And she prevailed upon us.

### Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.