

Acts 16:9-15

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10, 22 – 22:5

John 5:1-9

Sermon May 26th 2019

“Jesus Breaks Down the Barriers to God’s Healing and Restoration”

Health and wholeness are so vital to our well being. We are more efficient in our careers when physically and mentally healthy. We are more likely to experience meaningful loving relationships with others when emotionally healthy. We have more energy to invest in helping others when spiritually healthy. Health and wholeness are so vital to our well being.

Unfortunately, when we have an illness or an injury or a mental health problem we often run into barriers that make it harder for us to access the services needed that lead to restoring our health.

For example, the medication you need is too expensive and your insurance won’t cover it so your health gets worse as you are unable to treat your illness. There are diseases in some parts of the world that are still rampant due to affordability of drugs and vaccines.

Or you break a bone and find yourself waiting in an emergency waiting room for hours on end due to the volume of people waiting ahead of you. Suffering in pain. Hoping for relief.

Or you are mistreated due to your race or gender. I heard a story about an indigenous person in a Manitoba hospital who waited hours and hours in an emergency waiting room, because people thought he was just a street person looking for a place to warm up. This person ended up dying in the waiting room after many hours of receiving no service. This sparked an inquiry into the health system to evaluate the stigmatization that indigenous people often experience.

Or you are suffering from a mental health problem and find it hard to get help. The people in your life misunderstand you and feel unable to help. And even across professional circles you experience stigmatization as many professionals are undereducated when it comes to mental health awareness. However, you look to access a public service, since you need help, but find you are in a long line of people trying to access those same services.

Over the years, I have given counselling to many people who struggle with mental health problems and addictions. I see and hear the amount of stigma they face as they try and access services or help from family and friends.

Unfortunately, in our society we face barriers that make it harder for us to access services that restore our health.

In our gospel this morning, Jesus encounters a person with poor physical health laying by a pool. People believed that the waters in this pool restored their health. But, only when there were rushes of water that came in periodically from a stream.¹

Unfortunately, we hear that this person has not been able to access the pool in the 38 years he has been sick. Instead, this person faces barriers. Like for one, no one has ever bothered to come and help carry this person to the pool. Second, others in need bud in front of this person and get to the pool first. Third, this person is limited in how often and how much time he gets to access the pool since the pool only had healing abilities when the waters came rushing in. And now that Jesus the one who has shown compassion to people in need all over Galilee and Judea is standing before this person, Jesus is unable to do anything, because today is Sabbath. In the law about Sabbath, only when it is life or death, can a person aid another person during the Sabbath. So, there are a lot of barriers that this person faces as he tries to restore his health.

In response, Jesus decides to restore this person's health anyways. In a moment, Jesus breaks down the barriers that have inflicted this person for 38 years. Unlike all the others who have walked right on by this person without a care, Jesus stops and listens. Instead of expecting this person to fend for himself, squirming his way to the pool before the rush of water stops. Jesus invites this person to get up. To receive God's healing and restoration where this person is at. Even though Jesus risks scrutiny from the religious leaders for healing this person on Sabbath Jesus feels this person has suffered long enough.

In response to the barriers we face, Jesus comes to us in prayer, in hearing the word, in worship, and in community to restore our health. Jesus breaks down these barriers giving us full access to God's life-giving love.

We see this when we pray for God's help and receive the resources needed to overcome the barriers we are facing. We see this when a story of God's healing and restoration gives us hope that we too will experience this healing and restoration. We see this when we come away from a worship service feeling spiritually and emotionally renewed. We see this when we lean on our faith community for help and support.

As the church, Jesus invites us to respond to the barriers people suffer from, like Jesus does. Jesus invites us to create ministries in our community that help people access the services they need to experience restoration of their health. Whether it is a visitation team who listens and helps people heal spiritually and emotionally during times of suffering. Or a support group that helps people with their mental health problems. Or prayers that help people heal physically. Or offering education to tackle some of the stigma people face when dealing with their health concerns.

¹Retrieved this info from Robert Kysar in his commentary "John" in Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament.

Over the past few years, nations are now seeing mental health problems as a top issue in their societies. And are starting to pour money into services to help deal with the stigmas and lack of resources when trying to help restore people's mental health.

The Alberta Synod decided to create a mental health initiative to help congregations receive education to offer better supports to people who are struggling with mental health problems in their congregations.

Our church decided to create a mental health awareness ministry to help support and create educational opportunities for us so that we can like Jesus help break down the barriers that prevent people from accessing services that restore their mental health.

And so, our gospel this morning reassures us that like the person laying by the pool Jesus comes to us in the midst of our suffering and breaks down the barriers that make it hard for us to access the services we need to restore our health. Jesus comes to us in our spiritual practices. Jesus comes to us through our sisters and brothers in Christ. Giving us access to God's healing and restoration. God's life-giving love. Inspiring us to break down the barriers for others so that everyone can have access to God's healing and restoration. God's life-giving love.

Let us pray, loving God, we give thanks that you break down the barriers that make it hard for us to experience your healing and restoration in our lives. Give us hope and patience to come to you when we face suffering. And inspire us to help break down the barriers for others so everyone can access your healing and restoration. Access Your life-giving love. **Amen.**