

Sermon for 5/26/19  
Easter 6C

A man lay by the pools of Beth-Zatha in Jerusalem for 38 years, unable to move  
When the water in the pools bubbled, it was believed that they held healing powers  
For 38 years no one would help him, no one would go out of their way for him, no one was willing to wait a couple of days for a turn in order to help him first.  
Jesus saw him and had compassion, asking, “Do you want to be made well?”  
After the man explained his predicament, Jesus said, “Stand up, take your mat, and walk.”  
And that is precisely what the man did.

The pools of Beth-Zatha were rediscovered about 150 years ago, near a large church and not far from the Old City of Jerusalem.  
The participants in our pilgrimage to the Holy Land last October had a chance to spend time at the site.  
It was a profound privilege to be able to walk in the same places that Jesus walked and to see some of the same stones and structures that he undoubtedly saw.

In our pilgrimage group, there were 11 of us from Fredericksburg, about a dozen Maori people from the dioceses of New Zealand, and a few other people who came on their own.  
Together, we toured the Holy Land for nearly 2 weeks.  
There were significant cultural, economic, and age differences between us.  
At the opening wine and cheese reception for our time together, I made a point of trying to meet people I didn't know.  
I spoke to one rather imposing Maori man named Carlos; he had the long hair and tattoos that are part of his culture.  
It turned out that he is an Anglican deacon and had a family back home.  
I won't say that we became the best of friends, but at least we were able to connect for a simple conversation.

Our trip to Beth-Zatha happened the next day.  
At the end of our time there, our chaplain prepared to lead a prayer service and asked for volunteers to offer healing prayer for the members of our group.  
I volunteered, figuring that it would probably be my only chance to say healing prayers in a place where Jesus once healed a person.  
As we began the healing prayers, Carlos stood up, walked directly to me, and asked for my prayers.  
The conversation we'd had the evening before created enough of a connection that – I guess – he trusted me.  
And then another one of the New Zealanders came to me.  
And another.  
And another.  
I felt humbled: my simple reaching out to one person was enough to break down some of the barriers that separated us.  
It felt as if I had been given the grace to do one simple thing that Jesus would want me to do enabling a disparate group of people from all over the world to become united in Christ.

This experience reinforced my understanding that healing is about more than just physical health.  
It includes our emotional and our spiritual health as well.  
It was in offering healing prayer that, as a group, some of our divisions were healed through the love of Jesus Christ.

As someone who believes passionately that there are times when God is active in the world, I believe that faithful historians will look back on the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and be amazed at how many people and places were open to God's healing as we lived into the understanding that all people are created equal.  
In Asia, Great Britain recognized the equality and the independence of the Indian people, giving them back the right to govern their own country.  
In the United States there were multiple movements that opened the doors for people who had previously been marginalized and oppressed.  
The Civil Rights movement ended the injustice of legal segregation.

*The Rev. Kent D. Rahm  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Fredericksburg, VA*

The Women's movement allowed women the right to make choices in their lives rather than for all women having to live into the expectation of being wives and mothers.

And the Gay Rights movement helped millions of men and women to step out of the closet and be full, accepted members of society.

Even South Africa, following the horrors of Apartheid, developed into a far more open, far less oppressive nation. Important progress was made; there were clearly ways in which the world was coming closer to the equality that is everyone's God-given right.

Our not very distant history shows us that healing among people is possible, but why is it that we seem to live in an increasingly divided community, country, and world?

Something has happened in recent years; there has been a return to some of the hatred and discrimination that beleaguered the world for so many centuries.

The fear of immigrants from other cultures has caused many of the European nations to tighten their borders in ways that threaten to break the peaceful connections that have held sway since World War II.

To a large extent, that's what Brexit is about.

The strong man leader of Hungary is specifically inciting hatred against the Jews, even though over a half-million Hungarian Jews were killed in the Holocaust and Jews represent less than 1% of that country's population.

India just reelected Narendra Modi as Prime Minister, a man who, some say, has encouraged right wing attacks against Muslims in that Hindu majority country.

Here in the United States we don't have to look any further than Charlottesville where a city once identified with bow ties and khakis has become synonymous with the racist and anti-Semitic marches that took place there two summers ago.

Recent changes in many states' laws have rolled back the rights for women to make choices about birth control and abortion.

It feels as if we are moving backwards instead of forwards.

Jesus' message of equality is being ignored and replaced by a nationalism that can often result in hatred of anyone who isn't just like us.

Am I the only person who believes that the world needs some healing right about now?

I certainly hope that I'm not the only person who believes that healing comes from Jesus Christ.

Since that healing has to begin somewhere, why not with us?

There isn't one among us who is without prejudices, without discrimination, without some of the things that are driving the world apart and making it a far more dangerous place to live.

By ourselves, we will never overcome those personal weaknesses, those sins; we will never be as loving and as accepting as we are called to be.

We need help.

Through Jesus Christ, there's a strong connection between repentance and healing.

Jesus often told the people he healed that their sins were forgiven.

When we say the Confession, when we pray "forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us," when we begin to despair at the state of the world, let us confess our own unrighteousness.

Let us dare to admit – even to ourselves – that we're not the people we should be; we're not even the people that we want to be.

Let the essence of our prayer be, "Lord Jesus Christ, help me bring your love, your understanding, your peace more fully into the world."

It may not seem like much, but simple intentions, simple acts of connecting with others, simple attempts to do what we think Jesus is calling us to do can help bring more reconciliation into the world.

I know it can because I saw it happen when I said hello to Carlos.

May each of us be healed by and through the love of Jesus Christ.

And may each of us bring that healing out into the world that hungers for the love of Jesus.

*The Rev. Kent D. Rahm  
Trinity Episcopal Church, Fredericksburg, VA*