



LifeGroup Bible Study

August 18, 2024
John 5:1-8; Psalm 144

Community

TODAY'S THEME

Jesus heals on the Sabbath. It seems like nothing will stand in the way of Jesus reaching out and healing the broken people around him. Jesus' compassion for a man who had been ill for 38 years stands in stark contrast to the religious authorities, who are more concerned that he is working on the Sabbath.

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO KNOW?

If this is a story about the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed, who among us isn't? If we're asked if we want to be healed, how could the answer be anything but yes? If the real issue isn't about putting our hope in the power of God, then what else could it be?

WHAT DO WE WANT OUR SMALL GROUP TO DO?

We want to acknowledge our brokenness and trust Jesus for healing. We want to become agents of God's healing on behalf of others.

INTRODUCTION: THE ER

An Emergency Room (ER) is a medical treatment facility specializing in acute care of patients who present without prior appointment, either by their own means or by ambulance. Due to the unplanned nature of patient attendance, the department must provide initial treatment for a broad spectrum of illnesses and injuries, some of which may be life-threatening and require immediate attention. (*– wikipedia.org*)

ICEBREAKER

Have you ever been a patient in an emergency room? Describe your experience. What is it like when you get a lot of sick and hurting people together in one place?

A pool at the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem was like an ancient waiting room in the ER. Our text tells us that here the lame, blind, and paralyzed would gather. The pool was a place of healing, and there were many places like this where healing was supposedly common. This venue carried with it a sense of superstition. People believed that occasionally an angel would descend and stir the waters, and then the first one into the pool would receive healing.

As we study together today we'll explore our own brokenness and learn to more fully trust in Jesus for healing.

PRAY TOGETHER

Father God, we often feel like we're waiting, lingering for the moment to come when everything is made right. We recognize that, in many ways, we are each blind, lame and paralyzed. We are not able to see the needs of those around us. We are hesitant to be the hands and feet of Jesus. We are immobilized by our fears and failures. Give us hope that you can heal the broken places in our life. Give us faith to trust you for everything. Amen.

Content

John 5 begins a larger section that is commonly understood as the festival cycle. John 5 places Jesus in Jerusalem during "a festival of the Jews," most likely a Sabbath festival. An interesting, but not earth-shaking, note is that there's a lot of chatter about the actual placement of chapter 5. At the end of chapter 4 Jesus is in Galilee, but then suddenly in chapter 5 he's in Jerusalem. In chapter 6 he's back in Galilee. This is scintillating to some, but probably not so much for us.

Anyway, in chapter 6 we read about the Passover Festival; in chapters 7-8, the Tabernacles Festival; and in chapter 10, the Hanukkah Festival. What we can say for sure is that the festivals were of profound importance in first-century Judaism. That this story takes place within the context of the weekly festival of the Sabbath indicates that it's set within a framework of celebration and remembrance of God's faithfulness. Respect, reverence, devotion, awe, you name it – it's all due God. (*Read John 5:1-18.*)

• The Festival of the Sabbath; a day of rest. John has an agenda in the way he composes his Gospel. The sequence of events throughout the book reveal a rather sophisticated purpose. "The festival is the Sabbath and the argument that flows from it is based on rabbinic expectations for behavior and piety on the Sabbath. Above all, John (and Jesus) has a 'Sabbath understanding' of the festivals that we will see surface repeatedly in the festival cycle. Festivals were made by God to bring good gifts to his people, not to legislate and control behavior" (*– The NIV Application Commentary: John, page 171.*)

- Jesus enters the city at the Gate of the Sheep. Jesus is the great shepherd.
- There is a pool there identified as Bethesda. Greek texts also call it Bethzatha, Bethsaida, or Belzetha. The meaning is something along the lines of either "house of sheep" or "house of mercy."
- Jesus takes the initiative and asks him, "hey, do you want to be made well?"

• The man doesn't answer the question, and blames his current situation on others.

• Jesus doesn't play into any of that and simply tells the man to pick up his mat and walk.

• This man doesn't know Jesus, doesn't ask for his help and doesn't have any faith. There isn't any testimony of who Jesus is, no confession of sin, nothing. He simply obeys and is healed.

• But it's the Sabbath. That is a huge problem for those who have let orthodoxy, getting it right, living inside the box and trying to protect God get in the way of what God is trying to do – and with a pagan, no less! This man doesn't know Jesus, yet God is at work in his life!

• The man doesn't know Jesus. He simply points to his own healing. The joy of new life obliterates the legalism he must somehow debate. Talk about the emphasis being on the wrong syllable!

DISCUSSION Why is it such a problem for Jesus to heal on the Sabbath? What kind of modern day rule-keeping, or legalism, do we get stuck in? Give some examples. Does it bother you that Jesus heals without any confession of faith or repentance for sin? Where in our culture do people “wait by the gate” to get their healing? Where does superstition enter our story? Where's the line between superstition and faith? How do we know?

Our culture loves the idea that God helps those who help themselves. The truth is, that's nowhere in scripture. God helps those who are incapable of helping themselves. If this is a story about the blind, the lame and the paralyzed, who among us isn't?

DISCUSSION Name some ways in which we are blind. What are some ways in which we are lame? How are we paralyzed by fear and failure?

If the question is “do you want to be healed,” how could the answer be anything but “yes?”

DISCUSSION Where in your life do you feel you need the healing touch of God?

If the real issue isn't about putting our hope in the power of God, then what else could it be?

DISCUSSION What barriers stand in the way of truly putting our hope in God when it comes to healing? If God has the power, why isn't everyone healed? Are there some answers to prayer that we simply can't see?

GOING DEEPER: HOPE

We often say, “God couldn't possibly heal me; I'm such an unlikely candidate.” In this story, the man doesn't ask for healing. Even when Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed, he skirts the question. But he does have hope; he held out hope for 38 years! He must have seen

other miracles along the way. Hope lets you see the big picture of what God is up to. Be open to hope; be open to hoping in Christ.

DISCUSSION What role does hope play in our healing? How does seeing healing in others impact our faith?

Application

We want to acknowledge our brokenness and trust Jesus for healing. How can we do this?

We want to become agents of God's healing on behalf of others. How can we do this?

As a group develop a list of how to be an agent of healing.

Example:

• We could be God's “presence” for someone in the hospital simply by sitting with them.

• We could be God's _____ by _____.

• We could be God's _____ by _____.

• We could be God's _____ by _____.

• We could be God's _____ by _____.

PRAY TOGETHER

God who heals, give us eyes to see our broken places and trust you for healing. When we're tempted to live for ourselves, make us the hands and feet of Jesus for someone else. When we are paralyzed by fear, teach us to trust you in all things. We want to be your agents of healing in our broken world. Lead us to those people and places where we can make a difference. You have blessed us to be a blessing. Make this idea a living reality in the coming week. Amen.

ADDITIONAL CONVERSATION AND REFLECTION

Stewardship

JOHN 6:1-14

To steward all that God has given us is to responsibly manage all that God has provided for us. In John 6 we find the story of the feeding of the five thousand, in which there is a profound thread of stewardship. In the face of seemingly very little (five loaves and two fish), there is a remarkable outcome (five thousand people are fed). God can do a lot with a little. But God calls us to be in the middle. Consider the places of scarcity that you're aware of today. How can God use you to bring a sense of abundance (of grace, mercy, peace, etc.) to those places?

John 5:1-18 NLT Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. (2) Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. (3) Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. (5) One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. (6) When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?” (7) “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.” (8) Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” (9) Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, (10) so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!” (11) But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” (12) “Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded. (13) The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. (14) But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.” (15) Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him. (16) So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules. (17) But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.” (18) So the Jewish leaders tried all the harder to find a way to kill him. For he not only broke the Sabbath, he called God his Father, thereby making himself equal with God.



St. Paul Lutheran Church

“Your Refuge from the Storm”

Daily Walk on the Rock

The week of August 18, 2024

Monday

JOHN 6:60-71

What teachings of Jesus do his followers find so unacceptable (see John 6:54-56)? Perhaps they don't think he's the kind of powerful king they had expected and hoped for. He puts much more value on faith than deeds, which seems difficult to understand. Why do Peter and the other disciples stay, and how does verse 65 relate? Do you find Jesus' teachings hard to understand, and even more difficult to live out? We, like the disciples, have the choice of rejecting Jesus or accepting him. How have you responded to Christ? Is he Lord of your life, or are you looking for a more powerful king? Jesus alone is our source of eternal life; there is no other way. This week, make a commitment to be in his Word and learn about his teachings and how they can be applied to your life.

Tuesday

JOHN 7:1-24

Jesus' brothers urge Jesus to attend the feast. What is their rationale (2-5)? What rumors are going around about Jesus in Jerusalem (12-13)? Why does Jesus decide to go secretly? The people are astonished at his teaching (14-15). What does Jesus' response reveal about his authority (16-19)? What point in Jesus' teaching do the leaders seem to be missing? Think about how Jesus reveals himself to you. Jesus asks each of us, “who do you say that I am?”

Wednesday

JOHN 7:25-52

Take note of who is saying what about Jesus, and what is causing confusion. Why does the teaching of Jesus in 14-29 provoke the responses in 30-31? How do you account for the wide range of opinions about Jesus? In John 4:10, Jesus uses the term “living water” to refer to eternal life. Here it refers to the Holy Spirit. How are they related (see John 1:33, Acts 2, John 16:7)? How is the Holy Spirit received? The controversy over Jesus' birthplace clouds the issue of his identity (41-42; see also Micah 5:2) What is the relationship in your life between believing the promises of Jesus and experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit? Are we, as individuals and as a church, sometimes just like the Jewish leaders, seeing ourselves as an elite group who think we have the truth, while those who disagree with us do not? God's truth is available for everyone, everywhere! What does that say to us about our sometimes self-centered and narrow attitude towards others? Spend some time in prayer.

Thursday

JOHN 8:1-30

Most early and reliable manuscripts do not include John 7:53 - 8:11. The Jewish leaders ignore the law by not bringing the man

along with the woman. The law required both parties to adultery be stoned (see Leviticus 20:10, Deuteronomy 22:22). What will the Pharisees accuse Jesus of if he tells them to let her go? If he tells them to stone her? How does he save her from this situation (7)? What an amazing story this is of grace and forgiveness. Jesus does not fold to the pressure of the Pharisees but, in accepting her, encourages her to sin no more (11). What a great time for us to stop and take an honest look at our lives. When others sin and fall short, are you quick to judge and condemn? Do you act as if you have never sinned, at least not as “bad” as them? We are always called by God to seek out ways to be encouraging to others, not ways to hurt them. What can you learn from Jesus about helping a friend?

Friday

JOHN 8:31-59

What does Jesus want to emphasize to the people who believe in him? What wrong assumptions confuse the issue of spiritual freedom for Abraham's descendents? Which issues does Jesus force them to confront (34-41)? How does Jesus challenge their claim (41)? Read verses 42-47 again, looking for Jesus' explanation of who belongs to God. Find Jesus' four claims in this chapter: verse 12, 32, 51 and 58. Which means the most to you? Why? What has knowing the truth set you free to do?

Saturday

JOHN 9

How do you answer the question concerning pain and suffering in our lives? In Jesus' day, most people would have said it was a direct result of a sinful life. But Jesus uses this to teach about faith, and to glorify God. What is the disciples' question in verse 2? What does Jesus' response reveal about how he views the man's suffering (3-5)? What is the “work of God” (3), the “night” that is coming (4), and the “Light of the world” (5)? Has there been a time when Jesus took a misfortune in your life and turned it into an opportunity to show his power? Are you asking the question, “what have I done wrong?” Pause and pray right now for strength and a clearer perspective. The people in this chapter are faced with the question, “who is Jesus”? That same question is here for each of us. Who *is* Jesus? Spend some time answering that question.

Sunday

PSALM 112

This is an awesome psalm about the security and advantages of having faith in God. This psalm reminds us that, if we expect God's blessings, we must revere him and willingly obey him. Do any of the lines from this psalm fit you? Which ones do you wish fit you? Read this psalm slowly, like a prayer. Praise the Lord!