

Healing of the Nations
Rev. Nicole Farley
First Presbyterian Church of Waukesha
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Revelation 21:10, 21:22-22:5

¹⁰And in the spirit he carried me away to a great, high mountain and showed me the holy city Jerusalem coming down out of heaven from God.

²² I saw no temple in the city, for its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.

²³And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it, for the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there. ²⁶People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations. ²⁷But nothing unclean will enter it, nor anyone who practices abomination or falsehood, but only those who are written in the Lamb's book of life.

¹Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb ²through 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. ³Nothing accursed will be found there anymore. But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him; ⁴they will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. ⁵And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign for ever and ever.

John 5:1-9

¹ After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. ³In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶When 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?’ ⁷The 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.’ ⁸Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ ⁹At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath.

Pray with me: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, Our Rock and Our Redeemer. Amen.

We take for granted that healing is important and desirable. These readings gave me reason to wonder why it's so important. I suspect the reasons are many and varied so perhaps there are combinations of the following: because we don't like brokenness, we are afraid of brokenness, we don't like pain, because we don't like sorrow, we don't like to suffer, we don't like being left out, because we are afraid of death. Healing is certainly important enough that Jesus demonstrated it and promised it. If we are healed we will have wholeness. If we are healed we have the chance to live to our full potential, we could see what we could really do. That all sounds great!

Healing, though, can also be scary, particularly if we've gotten used to our brokenness, in whatever form it takes, even comfortable with it. If we are healed, it's possible others' expectations might increase, or our own expectations. The natural "outs" that come with illness are gone. And for healing, sometimes, even commonly, something is required of us – maybe it's physical therapy, maybe it's a change in our diets, maybe it's taking a medication regularly, maybe redirecting our thoughts. And the idea of having a chance to live to our full potential might be scary, too. Nothing is holding us back.

If our nation was healed from **its** brokenness, then we would need to live up to something more. There would be no more excuses if our nation was healed from **its** hatred, its fear, its racism, its sexism, its other-ism, any ism, from greed and hoarding. (As example, I'm just as guilty of enjoying Super Bowl ads which cost as much as it would take to feed people for years.) If our nation was healed from **its** superiority, arrogance, and ugliness, then we would expect more of ourselves. We **should** expect more of ourselves. We would need to live up to the gospel.

Instead, though, we lay on our mats. We could get closer to the healing pool and stay there until the waters are stirred up again, so no one can get in front of us and in the way of our healing, but we lay on our mats, just out of reach of healing. The book of Revelation reads as a description of an other-worldly, futuristic society but we would do well to see it as intended, as representative of **both** God's coming reign **and** God's reign which has already begun here. Jesus says, "Stand up, take your mat, and walk," not "a day will come when you will stand up, take your mat, and walk."

So one day, we individuals, we individuals who make up nations, ask Jesus to change us, to heal us, despite the ramifications, undeterred by the consequences to follow. And **then** we become the people of the future realm, but here and now. Jesus is always asking, “Do you want to be made well?” When we say “yes,” there is no more night, which is not desirable because darkness is bad; it’s that there is no longer time for trouble to sneak in under the cover of darkness. There is no longer a place for secret plans to be made. And, because we have said we want to be healed, there is no longer need for the cover of darkness, and no more desire for darkness. God becomes our guiding light in every moment, day and night. You may have heard this realm mentioned another way, via the artist Prince: “A world of never-ending happiness / You can always see the sun, day or night.”¹

If we are healed - that is, if our brokenness which looks like hatred, fear, -isms, greed, hoarding, superiority, arrogance, or any other ugliness, is mended, is cured - we’re left with a lot of time on our hands, a lot of energy to re-direct, a lot less of ourselves to think about. It’s a big space that God can fill and, while we’ve always been people that God can guide, we become a people willing to let God do just that. God becomes our guiding light in every moment.

If we’re living into that realm as healed people, we might wonder what the tree of life is doing there. The tree of life makes a reappearance in Revelation after its appearance in Genesis, where it first provided for Adam and Eve.² In Revelation we read that it produces fruit each month AND its leaves are for the healing of the nations. The significance of fruit every month is that there is abundance which means no one goes hungry, no matter what time of year, for it is always harvest time. The significance of “nations” is that all peoples in **all** places are covered by this word. If we are people of the realm which we see in Revelation, then we’re an extension of the tree of life. If God is our guiding light, then are we not called to be agents of feeding so that none go hungry? If God is our guiding light, then are we not called to be agents of healing in this world?

¹ Prince, *Let’s Go Crazy* (I wouldn’t be worthy to call myself a teen of the ‘80’s if I didn’t offer my own nod to Prince in light of his own recent journey to “the afterworld.”).

² Genesis 2:9.

Friends, as I am wont to say, this is not easy, nor is it comfortable. It's familiar right here on our mats and we can find our own versions of "I have no one to put me into the pool" and "while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." But Jesus keeps asking, "Do you want to be made well?" This is a life's work, being healed of those "uglinesses" – and remember how healing often requires something of us. It begins again and again, each time we ask Jesus to change us, to heal us, despite the ramifications, undeterred by the fear of consequences to follow. Go out and be brave, my friends, undeterred by the fear of what might change if you were changed. Go, and be made well.

Let us pray: Yes, Lord, we wish to be made well. Heal us, make us stand, send us out, we pray. Amen.