Our next text will be from the gospel of John. The text that we will be reading will be a healing story that comes immediately after another healing story.

In this text that we will be reading, there will be a group identified and we may be uncomfortable with the way that they are portrayed. I am referring to the term “Jews.” It is very easy to read this text as a proof-text for anti-Semitism. This is the kind of text that can be cited to say that Jews should not be trusted because they killed Jesus.

But to read this text as a condemnation against Jews is an incorrect reading of this text. When John refers to the “Jews” in this text, he is referring to the Jewish religious leaders. He is not condemning all Jews and seeking to put Jews in a bad light.

Jesus is Jewish and the man that he heals in this story is Jewish. Rather than condemning “religious leaders,” the gospel writer John categorizes these leaders as “Jews.”

There is an interesting biblical translation decision that has been made concerning this text that we will be reading. When we get to the fourth verse you will not find the fourth verse in the main part of the text. If you read along in the pew Bible, you will find that the 4th verse is located at the bottom of the page in the footnotes.

That is because the oldest manuscripts of this story do not include verse 4. It is assumed that verse 4 was added later. That is why it is found in the footnotes. I will read this text with verse 4.

**Read John 5:1-18 (with verse 4)**

I will admit that when I read stories of healing in the Bible, I find myself playing the role of devil’s advocate. By that I mean, what about the people today who pray for healing and the healing does not occur? We have plenty of people who lift up examples of healing and they thank God for those healings. But what about the people that pray fervently and do not see a healing?

I want to share a video that was produced by a hospital that was dealing with the emotional struggles of their staff who worked hard to save people from death but who felt like failures many times.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yrjQWzzgf8w&mkt_tok=eyJpIjoiTWpVM05qSmpOMlkzTmpkbCIsInQiOiJEOGlIT3hjdWdoVmUxbnE5ZXlkN2RtSFBlVnFuaWx6ZTdQNkxFb2plRCtcL20zKytwSHJUaGRQZk9Cd0Jxc2FrSTViRDB1WEo1S2tzTkJ3bzVodEpwZ1pJbFwva3FOVWdOMU10clB1YkJUXC8rdEcrK1BcLzM3OGVIdUxuYjJvb2M0a3UifQ%3D%3D>

“Thanks for Trying”

If you want to find a story that proves that strong faith leads to healing, then this story from the gospel of John is not the text to cite. This is a text in which the person who is healed shows very little faith before the healing.

The story is set during a festival although we are not told what festival it is. Jesus is in Jerusalem beside a small sheep gate and beside a small pool. We are told that there are many people by the pool who have different limitations. Some are blind. Some are lame. And some are paralyzed.

One of the people that is there has been ill for 38 years. We are not told what illness he possessed but he has dealt with it for 38 long years. Jesus sees this one man in the crowd of many who are yearning to be made well. But for some reason that we are not told, Jesus chooses only this man out of the crowd.

Jesus asks him, “Do you want to be made well?” And the man responds with words that could be described as whining. “Sir,” he says, “I have no one to put me in the water and when the water is stirred then others get ahead me in line.”

It was believed that angels stirred the water according to the added verse 4 that we included in our reading today. Jesus then responds to the man and says, “pick up your mat and walk.” At once the man is made well and he begins to walk.

We are now told that this healing took place on the sabbath. The focus of the story now turns to the reaction of the Jewish leadership to this healing occurring on the sabbath. And the Jewish religious leaders are not happy about what Jesus has done.

Rather than focusing on this man being healed, these leaders focus on when it occurs. As a result, they miss this divine intervention in their presence.

As we acknowledge the religious conflict in this story, I can’t help but be directed back to the beginning of this story. Why is it that Jesus chose this man for healing and not the others? This man is not picked out because of his strong faith. He does not know who Jesus is. When we are introduced to this man, he is whining that he has not been healed.

But Jesus chooses him out of the crowd. But as Jesus chooses him out of the crowd, Jesus apparently ignores all of the others that need healing. Why is that? Why are some brought to healing while others are not?

This story does not give us an answer to that question. That is one of those “why” questions that we are not provided an answer to. And that is a question that we ask today in our world. Why do some experience healing while others do not? Why do some get better while others do not?

One thing that we do learn from this story is that healing is not related to one’s faith. This man was not chosen because of great faith and the others were not overlooked because of a lack of faith. But we are told in this story that sometime after his healing, the man is found by Jesus in the temple. While in the temple Jesus says to the man, “do not sin anymore.”

We do not know why Jesus chose this man. But we do know that this man responded to the healing by going to the temple. His healing led him toward seeking to understand faith.

We can certainly continue to ask questions as to why some are healed, and others are not. On this Memorial Day why are some veterans battling PTSD while others are not?

Why have some veterans taken their lives while others have not? Whether we experience the healing we desire or not, we are invited by Jesus to seek greater trust in him. To seek to walk with him and trust him.

The outcomes we desire may not be what is most important. What may be most important is how whatever we experience is an invitation to walk closer with God in Christ. AMEN.

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-Given: May 26, 2019 in Allison Creek Presbyterian (York, SC)