

Acts 16: 9-15  
Revelations 21:10, 22-22  
Psalm 67  
John 5: 1-9

The Reverend Laura Palmer  
St. Peter's Glenside  
May 22, 2022  
6 Easter Year C

### Start Somewhere

May the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable to thee, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer. AMEN

“Do you want to be healed?” Jesus asks to the man languishing beside the pool. If your initial response might have been “Well, duh,” then welcome. Who wouldn't? After 38 years. I mean, really. Isn't it obvious? No, maybe it's not.

What we see as obvious in scripture can easily divert us from deeper meaning and truth. Jesus knows what he's doing. We're so often the ones who need to catch-up.

If you're familiar with 12-step programs like AA, you know that nothing happens until the addict hits bottom and decides to change, to really change. No one can be talked into recovery if still in denial, no one can begin the transformative work that needs to be done unless they've hit bottom. No one can pick up their mat and walk unless they “want to be healed.” The question is never as simple as it sounds.

Notice that the man by the pool never answers Jesus' question: Do you want to be healed? Instead, he describes how difficult life has been for him. The point is not to blame the victim which is something Jesus never does. The point is that maybe Jesus saw something in him that the man did not see in himself: that the power to change was in him all along but he had to make the first move: to get up and walk. A bit like Dorothy in the *Wizard of Oz* who in the end, only had to tap her feet together and say “There's no place like home,” three times.

But's that in the movies. In real life, we all know people who don't want to be healed and have become resigned to their fate and stopped trying. People who stay in unhappy or abusive relationships because of the financial security or their shame and fear, resisting the healing that could come if they could honestly ask themselves, if they *want* to be healed. Because if the answer is “Yes” it can be the start of everything.

With candor and vulnerability, Debie Thomas expands on this in a *Journey with Jesus* essay:

I know exactly what it's like to say I want out, to say I want freedom, to say I want healing — and not quite mean it. I know what it's like to cling to brokenness because it's familiar. I know what it's like to make victimhood my identity. I know what it's like to benefit from the very things that cause me harm. I know what it's like to sink into

self-pity...I know what it's like to decide that I'm doomed to sit at the very edge of healing for the rest of my life, and never attain it.

That last line stings, doesn't it? "I know what's it's like to decide that I'm doomed to sit at the very edge of healing for the rest of my life, and never attain it."

Who among us hasn't bought at time share at the edge of healing, resisting taking the next step?

And one of the miracles, I think, in this text is that Jesus can see in us what we cannot always see in ourselves and he takes risks for our healing—pouring out himself for us, regardless of the cost.

When he encounters the man by the side of the pool it's the sabbath. A few verses later, the healed man is in trouble with the Jews for carrying his mat on the sabbath—which was considered a type of work. He explained that a man had told him to get up and walk but he didn't know who he was since Jesus had disappeared into the crowd—but later, Jesus sees the healed man in the Temple and his identity is both revealed then reported to those seeking to persecute him.

One can't escape the question of "Why?" Why this man? Why not any of the other lame, blind, or paralyzed around the pool, a mecca waiting for miracles?

Miracles defy explanation and are only understood, as grace. I see their randomness with regularity in the hospital. Children sometimes get better suddenly—or terribly worse—with utterly no medical explanation.

It's also worth noting that while we think of miracles as singular, Jesus offered a spectrum. Lazarus, raised from the dead, is often the unbelievable act many of us think of as miraculous. But it was the hemorrhagic woman who persisted, fought her way through a crowd, to touch Jesus' robe. No one need ask her if she wanted to be made well. Miracles come to us often through others; the physician who finds one more treatment to try at the end stage of an illness, and it works, or the teacher who believes in a student's potential so greatly she persists until there is a full college scholarship. Why do miracles unfold this way? No one knows.

Making miracles comprehensible seems pointless. It's impossible and what's the point? Miracles remind me of what the mystic Evelyn Underhill said about the divine: "If God were small enough to be understood, he wouldn't be big enough to be worshipped."

And miracles are bursts of hope and joy when they come. It is never too late to be surprised by joy nor do we know what might happen if we do an inventory of the pools where we sit in our lives, stalled by our own fears, denial, or resignation.

There was a sign at an exercise studio where I used to workout that said "Start somewhere."

This is something we can all do, starting here and now, at the Eucharist. Reminds Nadia Bolz-Weber in writing about this gospel text:

Come to *this* healing place in front of you— no one has to carry you to this table of grace. And here there is no one to get in your way. Come to this table and bring the

mats you think you are stuck lying on and lay them at the feet of your savior who bids you walk and be free.

It's never too late. Start somewhere.

AMEN