

Something Lacking Fourth Week of Lent Tuesday, March 8, 2016 8:15 AM
Ez 47:1-9, 12; **Jn 5:1-3a, 5-16** (The grace of God and the healing of God does not necessarily change people.)

“Do you want to be well?”

This story is full of power. It is a story of Jesus unleashing the grace of God within him. It’s a story of **Jesus reforming the very idea of Torah**. In another case Jesus says, **“The sabbath is made for man, not man for the sabbath.”** Well, you can see in the mentality of who are called “the Jews” here, you can see a mentality that really the sabbath is supposed to be served, not the other way around. Jesus wants to say that it is really humanity that God wants to serve. **God wants to serve humanity**. This is the opposite of what a lot of people imagined. They imagined that God was demanding service and demanding certain forms of honor and respect, among which the sabbath was almost the most important, or nearly the most important. This is not at all the mind of God. **That’s what Jesus tried to say. No, you don’t understand the mind of God.** You are devout. You are religious, but you are wrong. You don’t get it.

Now you might ask yourself did Jesus deliberately heal on the sabbath to create this confusion? And I think probably the answer is, yes, because **he deliberately wanted to change people’s minds**. Did it work? In this case, no.

Now John says that this **man was lying there for thirty-eight years** and his excuse was that someone always got to the pool first. Well, that’s rather odd, as if only the first one in would ever be healed. I don’t know where he ever got that idea. Maybe that’s what people said, but it’s very odd. It’s very odd for anyone to believe it. But thirty-eight years, a very interesting number. **What is the perfect number? Forty**. Jesus fasted for forty days. Moses was up on the mountain for forty days and forty nights. The people were on the journey to the promised land for forty years. Now actually they weren’t actually moving for forty years. Most of the time they were actually camped, but the journey took forty years. **Forty is this number of fullness**; this is thirty-eight. **There is something missing; there is something lacking, and there’s something wrong with this man. It isn’t simply that he can’t walk. There is something else missing.**

Nonetheless, Jesus restores him to full health. And what does he do in response? **He betrays him**. When the Jews say, well, “Who is it that told you to carry your mat?” he says, well, “I don’t know who it was.” Now, again, that’s a little odd too because by this time Jesus was well-known. He was known in Judea. He was known in Galilee. He was known in

Jerusalem. He was known all around, but not to this guy! Again, something lacking in knowledge, **something lacking in body, something lacking in mind, but something even worse: lacking in spirit** because when Jesus went back and saw him in the Temple and said, “Now reform your life,” he goes and he reports, “Ah, the man that told me to carry my mat and the man who healed me was Jesus.” **So this good turn, this good work, this healing becomes another movement toward betrayal and persecution, the passion and death he will experience in the coming weeks.**

So John wants us to think about all this. **The grace of God and the healing of God does not necessarily change people.** God’s grace is very often thrown away. It’s wasted. God is wasteful. Some people are not there; **they are not ready for what God really intends for them.** Sometimes even physical healings don’t do people any good because inwardly there is still something terribly lacking and there is such **a complete lack of readiness to respond to the love of God**, to the invitation of God, that the healing goes for nothing. John, I believe, wants us to look at life now on many levels. On a level of time this man had been there, but not long enough, only thirty-eight years, not a fullness of time. This is not the fullness of time. Jesus worked this sign, for whatever reason, we don’t know his mind, on the sabbath. I believe, but I can’t prove it, **deliberately on the sabbath to bring new attention to what God really wanted: to serve humanity**, to bring goodness into the world, and not to be served, and not to be honored. This man having been healed, still was lacking in knowledge; and when that was healed or fulfilled, he was still lacking in spirit, and he became one of the first to betray Jesus. So it goes. But did Jesus stop his work?