

2019 05 26 – Colourful Birds

John 5:1-9

Today's scripture reading is a story of healing. It is the story of a man who had been sick for thirty-eight years. For many of those years this man had laid by the side a pool called Bethesda, in the city of Jerusalem. This was a pool famous for its healing powers. It was said that if an angel (probably in the form of a breeze) came and stirred the water, then the first one to step in would be completely healed.

So one day, when Jesus was in Jerusalem, he walked by the pool and he asked the sick man, "Do you want to be healed?" That seems like a crazy question to ask, doesn't it. Who, in their right mind would not want to be healed? Can you think of reasons why someone might say, "No"? I guess it would depend on what type of healing we were talking about, wouldn't it? Healing usually involves change – change that can be physical, emotional, mental or even spiritual.

Ahh! That's the crux of it: healing is about change and change is often painful. Whatever our illness might be, at least it is familiar and we know what to expect from day to day. Those of you who have experienced surgery know just how painful physical healing can be. Those of you who experienced loss know the excruciating pain of grief. In each case we choose whether we are willing to be healed, whether we are willing to go through the pain, whether we are willing to accept the unknowns, the uncertainty that healing can bring.

The man by the pool answered Jesus saying, “Rabbi, I don’t have anyone to put me into the pool once the water has been stirred up. By the time I get there, someone else has gone ahead of me.” Was this just an excuse or had he really tried to be healed? It’s one thing to be given the option of healing and to refuse it. It’s another thing to have so many barriers to healing that it seems impossible. It’s not clear which was true for this particular man. All we know is that when Jesus told him to pick up his mat and walk... he did.

As I mentioned before, healing comes in many forms. Today I want to share with you a story of healing that is not about fixing a physical or mental or emotional ailment. It is a story about finding the courage to speak and to live our own truth. It is a story about being the child of God that we are meant to be. It is a story about breaking through barriers of ignorance, fear and discrimination in order to live a life of health and wholeness.

This story will be told using a music video. The songwriter, who goes by his last name, Wrabel, explained in an interview why he wrote the song and then produced this video:

We wrote it on the 23rd of February [2017], the day that Trump took away federal protection for trans students in public schools. The thing that really pushed me to write it was, I was talking to two of my biggest fans, which are two trans teenagers. ... I was hearing what it was like to actually be a trans kid in public school that day. It was awful. I thought that would give a mean kid more of an excuse to be mean, and to be hateful, and that’s

exactly what it did. My plan was to just write a sweet simple song just for them and [to help them] carry on. So that's what really pushed me to write it. https://www.huffpost.com/entry/interview-wrabel-theres-something-wrong-in-the_b_599b5941e4b0ac90f2cba94d?guccounter=1

The song is called The Village. Here it is with the story in video...

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tilsrO-3gcQ&feature=youtu.be>

Let's go back to words that were printed on the screen near the beginning of the video, you will also find them in today's bulletin.

In nature, a flock will attack any bird
that is more colourful than the others
because being different is seen as a threat

As I said before, this is not a story about healing a physical, mental or emotional ailment. This is a story about a teenager who doesn't fit our society's understanding of gender. This is a story about the healing that needs to take place in "The Village." It is a story about the education, the understanding, the acceptance that is needed in our society so that all members of the village, even the "colourful" ones can be themselves and can thrive. This is a story about a village, a society that has been sick for a very long time (even longer than 38 years).

We know that healing, that change is never easy, but let's begin with, what may be for you, a new understanding of gender. Most of us grew up learning that

there were two genders: male and female. Our language supports that understanding with two types of pronouns: his/him or her/she. We also learned that women were supposed to look and act feminine and that men were supposed to look and act masculine. Our society also defines for us the characteristics of what is feminine and what is masculine.

The first thing we need to let go of, the first change we need to make as we move this village towards health and wholeness is the assumption that gender is binary. Gender is something that lies on a continuum and each one of us fits somewhere along that continuum. In fact, I'm going to blow your minds and suggest that we need four different continuums to fully understand what we once lumped into two little words: male and female. Today we are going to look at two of those continuums.



Woman

Man

Let's begin with a person's gender identity. Gender identity is each person's internal and individual experience of their gender. It is your sense of being a woman, a man, both, neither or anywhere along the gender continuum. It's not about what sexual organs you may or may not have but rather what you know in your mind, in your heart and in your soul. A person's gender identity may be the same as or different from your birth-assigned sex. If your birth-assigned sex is

female and your gender identity is male then you belong near the male end of this continuum and you probably prefer to use male pronouns. People who fall in the middle of this continuum aren't comfortable with he or she, her or him, so they have to create a new pronoun that works for them



Heterosexual **Homosexual**
Bisexual

It is important to note that Gender Identity is fundamentally different from a person's sexual orientation. Sexual orientation refers to who you are physically and emotionally attracted to. Sexual orientation is also on a continuum. Some members of the village are heterosexual (are attracted to the opposite gender), some are homosexual (attracted to the same gender) and some of us are attracted to both. Most of us belong somewhere along this continuum. But there are even other orientations that go beyond this simplistic diagram.

These two diagrams may have opened up more questions than answers for you, and that's OK. This is just the beginning in our understanding of the diversity in our village, in our society and in our world. And understanding is just the first step in our healing process. So may we all be willing to be changed, to be healed. May we all be willing to follow Jesus' call to health and wholeness. May we all be willing to truly celebrate the diversity of God's creation, including all the colourful birds!