

The VIC Sunday of Easter

Saint Paul's Episcopal Church/La Iglesia Episcopal de la

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Peter W. Marty talks of Jesus as fallible in a recent column for The Christian Century. We know very little about Jesus' child and young adulthood. There is little about it in the Christian Testament. We have the birth narratives in Matthew and Luke. Matthew has the family as refugees in Egypt, and Luke tells of annual trips to Jerusalem for the Passover. At the age of 12, Jesus stays behind without his parents' knowledge, as every child seems to do, and somehow disappear, cresting panic. Are you listening, Armani? Marty speaks of a painting by Sir John Everett Millais, Christ in the House of His Parents, sometimes called The Carpenter's Shop (1849-50), which shows an injured Jesus surrounded by family.

When there are gaps in the narrative, humans have the innate drive to fill in the blanks and complete the story. In this case, we see the family in Joseph's "carpenter shop," and the entire family appears to be working on a door. Jesus and Mary, both redheads, are the central figures in an English painting, and Jesus has slipped while pulling a nail from the door they are working on, cutting the palm of his hand. Mary kneels beside Jesus to comfort him, while Joseph holds the injured hand, and cousin John comes around Joseph with a bowl of water to cleanse the

hand. Also in the scene are Mary's mother, Anne, and a second adult male. Besides all the foretelling of the images in the painting, it shows Jesus' humanity and frailty. He can make a mistake, slip, and injure himself just as we all can.

In Millais's painting, he highlights Jesus's human nature. To be human is to be fallible. It means making mistakes, stubbing one's toe, misspelling a word, or slicing one's hand. The blood from Jesus's hand falls on his foot, foreshadowing the Crucifixion. It is not a moral error to cut one's hand, but it is a learning experience. Why do they have to be painful?

Paul and Silas also learned a lesson in discernment. In Acts 16, before the vision and meeting Lydia, not a '... a man of Macedonia,' they had been forbidden by the Holy Spirit to go to Asia and were turned away from Northwest Asia Minor by the Spirit of Jesus, finally landing in Troas and waiting for direction. The vision comes, and Paul and Silas are off on a voyage. So, does one sit and wait to hear the ideal path to find the ideal mission of the church and not move ever, or does one see that failure and denial are options before being given the mission, which may not fit where one thought they were heading, but is being handed to them?

Could the call Paul finally answered have to do with a need and not a want? "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Especially the needs of those around us. Humans are not always at their best when judging between needs and wants, especially when the

culture is hammering away at the wants part. In a consumer market, there is the trap of want. In the early church, the evangelists were persuaded that people might need the gospel. Today, we often hear that we need to convince people they want Jesus, but perhaps the true answer is that they need Jesus.

In John, we find Jesus moving on from one healing with “After Jesus healed the son of the official in Capernaum, there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.” The healing of the son of a “certain royal official”, “certain nobleman”, government official, an official, or king, depending on translation, who comes to Jesus after hearing he was in town, requesting that Jesus heal his dying son. First, Jesus rebukes him and all humanity; ‘Unless you see signs and wonders, you will not believe.’ Several translations add the word ‘people’ after the word ‘you’. The official replies, “Sir, come down before my little boy dies.” Jesus tells him that his son will live, and the official believed and left. Jesus continued to the festival. (*Jn 4:46-50*)

Jesus comes into Jerusalem, and the pools at Beth-zatha, which were said to be very large, and many invalids lay waiting for an angel to come and stir the waters in due season, and the first one in would be healed. Almost sounds like the current situation in Emergency Services. Mary Ann and I have seen what is supposed to be a portion of the ruins of Beth-zatha, and it would be tough for someone who had been lying there for 38 years to make it to the pool on his own accord. I can see the question "Do you want

to be made well?” Reflected in Jesus’ question to the blind beggar in Luke 18, “What do you want me to do for you?”

There is a ring of; do you want to change? In these questions, do you even believe that you are capable of this change because it is going to turn your whole life around? Can we even begin to answer the question of why him and not someone else? We can do better; the guy didn’t really need a miracle; he needed someone to park him by the pool, stay with him, and toss him in when the angel showed up, that neighbor thing. The church cannot cure the world or society, but it can work to cultivate something different and bring healing to a broken system. God can do it, but not this side of resurrection. Although I have seen lots of healing that people would not consider miraculous or supernatural, something was at work, and it wasn’t any system.

The last sentence of the readings leads to a classic authoritarian reaction: “Now that day was a Sabbath.” Jesus has not only disrupted the system of the pool but has threatened those with an interest in keeping those rules in place, and he will be put on trial, not only for “working” on the Sabbath but also for blasphemy, claiming to be God's son. And he responds to those who judge him, “How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?” Jn 5:44.

I have been healed not only by those whose vocation is healing but also by the hope-filled proclamation that God can work

miracles. Jesus' life is embedded in specific relationships, places, and times. The grand sweep of God's love may be universal, but the application is personal. Jesus deals in particulars. We do too.

It is in the relationships that healing can occur, whether with individuals, families, friends, the church, neighbors, the world, or especially with God. All play a role in dealing with the fragility of human beings. Our vocation is to trust\