

**25 MAY 2025 EASTER 6**

**Rev Wayne Toleafoa**

**DO YOU WANT TO BE WELL**

**Readings:**

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

**Introduction:**

Sometimes it's difficult to see a reason why the compilers of the Revised Common Lectionary put certain readings together.

There are four readings for each Sunday: Firstly a psalm, (which we used as our Call to worship today), secondly an Old Testament Lesson (which has been replaced by a reading from Acts during the 50 Days between Easter and Pentecost), thirdly a reading from one of the Epistles (which has been replaced by a reading from the Book of Revelation during the 50 days between Easter & Pentecost) and fourthly and finally, a reading from one of the four gospels.

Usually, the gospel reading is the 'guiding' reading for the day.

This week, I found it difficult to find a common theme although three of our passages mention 'water'.

Another common theme that comes through today, is 'God as Healer' at every level of human life: physical, social and psychological.

**So let's stick with the themes of 'Water' and 'God as a healer' and see where they take us.**

**Water of course is vital to our existence.** Life on earth is only possible because of a combination of elements including H<sub>2</sub>O.

NASA scientists are working flat out to find another planet like Earth where there might be water and where humans and wildlife might be able to thrive. So far, no such luck.

Two thirds of our planet is covered in water and at one time it was the only means of transport between separated nations and peoples.

Water – or the sea - is still a major means of transporting our exports and imports and still the alternative to flying for tourists and business travellers alike.

Anyone who has been to sea knows how awesome it is to travel by sea. The sea conjures up all kinds of emotions in people from feelings of love to abject fear.

The sea has even been compared to God – a provider and protector and an unpredictable presence.

In the Hawke's Bay, the 'Fruit Bowl' of the country, we know first-hand how important fresh water is to our farms, orchards and vineyards.

Water is also important in our Christian Faith. It is the sign of cleansing. In baptism we are symbolically washing away an old life and beginning a new life.

During my ministry, I've been asked by Maori people and more recently Pakeha too, to perform a cleansing rite in the room or house where a death has occurred. I bless and sprinkle water throughout the room or house to symbolize cleansing. Or lifting the tapu. A kind of baptism of the space.

**It is in a sense the healing of a place of death and helps the grieving family heal as they go on without their loved one.**

### **Our Gospel Reading : John 5:1-9**

Our 'guiding' reading today, the gospel story, happens around a pool of water where we see God as Healer.

**I find the story fascinating and see it as a study of someone who used his disability as a crutch, if you'll pardon that crude pun. It is a study of someone who was wedded to his disability.**

For thirty-eight years, the man in the gospel story, sat next to a pool which he believed had healing properties. And he never managed to climb in, or even shuffle into the pool in thirty-eight years.

His excuse (the one he told Jesus) was that every time the water began to swirl, (believed to be the activity of an angel) he had no one to help him into the pool.

His story sounds a little implausible given the amount of time the man spent at the pool. Surely in 38 years he could have hatched a plan to get himself into the pool?

Thirty-eight years was close to a 'lifetime' in the time of Jesus. 30 to 40 years was about the average life-expectancy of males in first century Rome.

It's as though his disability was his 'business' – his means of making a living.

I remember seeing similar beggars in parts of Asia, the Pacific Islands and even in wealthy America. Beggars who displayed their wounds, or their disabilities openly, hoping for sympathy and money.

Jesus asked the man a telling question:

'Do you want to be made well?'

Finding no more excuses, he replied that he did want to get well and Jesus commanded him to leave his old life behind and walk into a new life.

### **Acts 16:9-15**

**Our first reading from The Acts of the Apostles also involves water, and the more generalized healing we call wholeness, or shalom.**

In our Acts reading the missionary-minded Paul had a vision of a man from Macedonia asking for help, so he, Silas and Luke (the recorder of Paul's missionary journey) made their way by sea to several mediterranean ports – arriving finally at Philippi, the main city in Macedonia.

On the sabbath day they went outside the city gate to a place by a river which was apparently a place where people went to worship.

We are not told who went there to worship or why they worshiped by the river. It may have been one of those places that makes one feel 'worshipful'. Perhaps there was something awesome about the place. Or it was a place known for its tranquillity.

Whatever the reasons why - it was considered a sacred space – a number of people were drawn to it. Including a wealthy woman by the name of Lydia – a manufacturer of expensive purple cloth.

As he did so often, Paul preached into this sacred space to Lydia and her women friends, and as a result, Lydia was converted, and she and her household were baptized in the nearby river.

Knowing that Paul and his companions (Silas and Luke) had no place to stay, Lydia offered them a place to stay until they moved on.

Lydia was thus the first convert in Phillipi and one of the founders of the Philipian church that Paul was so proud of.

**Water was for Lydia and her household, the symbol or the gateway to a new life and no doubt, that river for Lydia, held a new significance.**

**The healing that Lydia and her household experienced was the healing of wholeness or shalom.**

### **Revelation 21:10**

In our second reading, from Revelation, we continue with the apocalyptic vision of John the Divine who is credited with writing the Book of Revelation.

In last week's reading from Revelation, we read about the new heaven and new earth joining together, where there was no more 'sea'. In that instance sea water was regarded as the symbol of chaos.

The mythology and the psyche of the Jewish people is based around the land rather than the sea. The 'desert' where the new nation of Israel was formed during their exodus from slavery. The Promised 'Land' was their symbol of well-being and God's shalom.

**In this week's reading, also from Revelation 21, water is now regarded as something peaceful and life giving.**

John tells his readers:

*<sup>1</sup>Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb <sup>2</sup>through the middle of the street of the city. On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, producing its fruit each month; and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.*

In John's vision, water is flowing from the throne of God, through the middle of the new Jerusalem, feeding the trees of life on the two riverbanks. The trees, in turn, produce fruit and leaves which are for, 'the healing of the nations'.

**Water is seen a blessing in this vision, connected to 'the healing of the nations.'**

**PRAYER** (*Psalm 67 & Revelation 22:1-5*)

God of all nations, we thank You for the abundance of Your blessings.

The psalmist declares, the earth has yielded its increase,  
and You have poured out Your goodness upon us.

We rejoice in the vision of Your kingdom,  
where the river of life flows,  
where the nations are healed,  
and where we will see You face to face.

We pray for Your loving presence in our lives.

Strengthen our faith, deepen our love, and equip us by Your Spirit  
to bear witness to Your grace.

May we live in the hope of Your renewal,  
knowing that You are making all things new.

Through Christ our Saviour.

**Amen.**