

John 5:1-16

Aim of lesson

To show that Jesus had the power to cure an invalid. To show how the Jewish leaders were antagonized by Jesus' healing on the sabbath.

Background study

Map showing Bethesda (Bethzatha, RSV). John 5:36.

Suggested outline of lesson

Scene setting: health

Introduce the story with a discussion of modern medical and welfare provision for invalids, (e.g. government aid, home nursing, wheelchairs, walking aids etc.). in order to compare and contrast the hopelessness of the sick or disabled in Biblical times. It will be difficult for children to imagine the plight of the destitute, who were forced to rely on the generosity of others and on begging.

Scene setting: feast time in Jerusalem

Set the scene. Because it was a feast time Jerusalem would be even busier than usual. The sheep market would be crowded with people purchasing animals for temple sacrifices. The streets would be thronging with pilgrims from many areas. Within the porches surrounding the pool the great numbers of lame, blind, diseased and paralysed people would have made a pathetic picture as they pinned their hopes on the remote possibility of a cure. Simply explain that the Jews believed the stirring of the water to be the work of an angel, without attempting to decry the efficacy of this belief or to write it off as mere superstition. Enter into the feelings of the man who for thirty-eight years had been hoping to be cured. The fact that he had come to the pool again showed that he had not given up hope even now despite his repeated frustration and disappointment.

The story: Jesus interacts with the invalid and heals him

Why did Jesus ask: "Do you want to be healed?" when the man would have been there for no other reason. Surely it would not only fasten the man's attention on Jesus but also focus his mind on his great need, by having to put it into words. The man's answer seems to indicate that he had no friends (cf. the man let down through the roof).

Draw attention to Jesus' utter compassion. He was not responding to a direct plea nor to a demonstration of faith. At the authoritative words of Jesus, the man was immediately cured and given the strength to stand and walk. Remind the children how weak one feels after a period in bed, yet after thirty-eight years of illness this man was able to get up at once and carry his bed. Jesus had proved that he had power even greater than the

miraculous waters of Bethesda! The man's sudden ability to walk roused great interest and a crowd soon surrounded him. Meanwhile, Jesus slipped away from the commotion.

Scene setting: sabbath day laws

Explain to the children that this was the sabbath, a holy day, on which Jews were forbidden by God to work or to carry heavy loads. Show how the Jewish leaders' obsession with ritual and detail prevented them seeing the greatness and supreme goodness of the miracle.

The story: Jealousy of the Pharisees sparked by the miracle cure

The man went to the temple, not knowing who it was who had cured him. Jesus sought him out and his words made the man realize who it was who had cured him: he was then able to tell the Jewish leaders. Their jealousy drove them to hate Jesus sufficiently to want to kill him, though the miracle itself should have persuaded them that this man was from God.

Relevance to the children's lives

Jesus cured this man because he was sad to see him suffering, and wanted to help him. We want to be like Jesus as much as we can. We cannot make ill people well again. What can we do to follow Jesus' example? (We can show sympathy for the old and handicapped, talk to them, read to them, run errands for them, write letters to them, etc.)

Worksheets

The message reads 'Jesus has the power to heal'.

The jumbled words are (top to bottom, left to right), SIN, SABBATH, MAT, LAW, YEARS, WATER, BETHESDA, JESUS, FRIENDS, TEMPLE.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, thank you for Jesus' kindness. May we be sympathetic when we see the suffering of others, so that we are moved to do what we can to help them. Amen.

Memory verse

"Whatever you wish that men would do to you, do so to them" (Matthew 7:12).