

by Pat Marrin

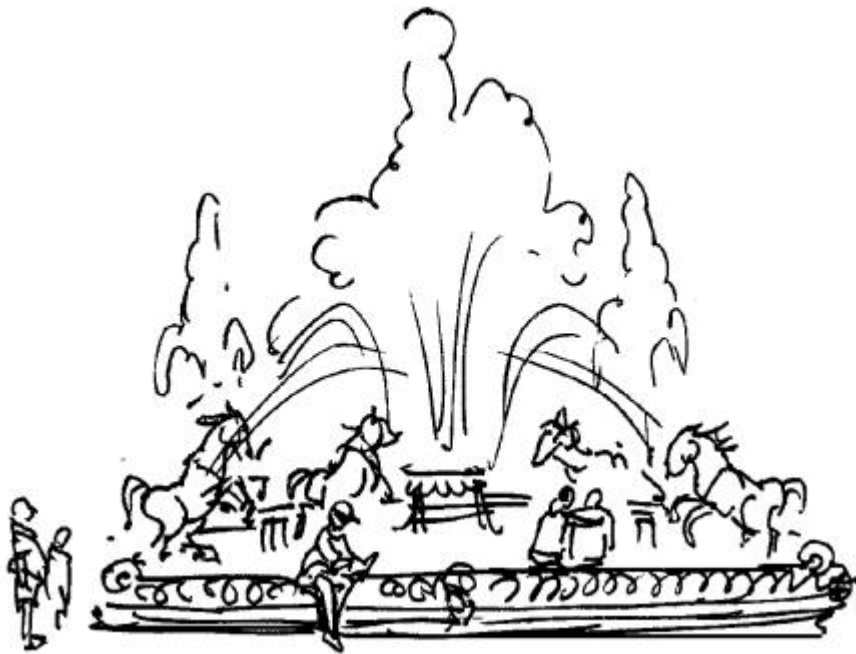
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“Do you want to be well?” (John 5:7).

Ezek 47:1-9, 12; John 5:1-16

Biblical Creation begins with water, the source of life revered especially by desert people. Paradise, or Eden, was a mythical garden from which flowed the four great rivers on the alluvial plain of Mesopotamia. The prophet Ezekiel envisions the temple of God as the wellspring of life-giving water flowing in every direction to support every form of life, including fruit trees with medicinal leaves.

The fourth Gospel presents Jesus as the fulfillment of this imagery as the source of living waters. The pool of Bethsaida in Jerusalem is the setting for the healing of a paralytic who has been waiting 38 years, the time the Hebrews wandered in the desert en route to the Promised Land. The pool was fed by an underground reservoir for rainwater that was stirred by an angel to grant healing to the first person to enter the pool.

Jesus curiously asks the paralytic, “Do you want to be well?” The long sojourn in the desert with Moses was not a delay on God’s part but a resistance by the people to submit to God’s direction. Sin paralyzes, evidenced by illnesses caused by addiction

that cannot be healed until the person wills that outcome. This theme underlies other stories, like the healing of the paralytic brought by four friends, or the blind Bartimaeus when Jesus asks him, "What do you want me to do for you?" Can blindness or paralysis become a way of life we get used to and are reluctant to change?

The hard heart is a dry heart, lacking the moistness of compassion, the tears of repentance. Prayer is a form of thirst for God, or for justice. We enter the Lenten desert to ask for spring rains to soak our dry souls, deepen our spiritual roots to living water, the source of Life. Jesus asks us, "Do you really want to be well?" What would have to change if we were empowered to overcome our passive ways, low expectations, excuses and procrastination? Do we want to be Easter people? Will we be ready to renew our baptismal promises at the Vigil and continue our discipleship with Jesus? Then come to the water.