

HAVE RESTED ON ~~THE~~ SABBATH DAY, ~~THAT~~ WAS NOT TO BE UNDER-
STOOD AS IMPLYING THAT GOD CEASED TO BE ACTIVE ONCE THE WORK
OF CREATION HAD BEEN SPOKEN. ~~HENCE~~ THE REMARKABLE WORDS ON
WHICH I HAVE NEVER HEARD A SERMON PREACHED. "MY FATHER STILL
GOES ON WORKING."

Here Jesus joined hands with many devout
Jews and Christians who make a distinction
between God's original creative work which
brought all things into being, and God's
continuing sustaining work in his creation,
and redemptive work among his sinning and
suffering human family. For Jesus it was
inconceivable that this redemptive work of God
could be switched off one day a week, because
on that day he continued to rest. "My Father
still goes on working," he says, "and I am
working too." That made his enemies even more
furious. Now to the crime of sabbath-breaking
they brought the charge of blasphemy. By such
words he was making himself the equal of God!
He couldn't win.

Back to the question: "What is God
doing?" The God whom Jesus reveals is a
healing God. Do you believe that? Nothing in
the Gospels shines out more clearly. Jesus
not only believed in a heavenly Father who was
a God of grace, constantly active in this
human family, healing, reconciling, forgiving,
renewing faith and hope and love: he himself
was linked with his Father in this redemptive
work. His Gospel flows through our torn and
tormented world as a cleansing and healing
stream. This is what God is doing -- for his
human family. That cripple by the pool of
Bethesda is the symbol of our need. There's
not one of us who is not crippled in some way,
in body, mind, or spirit, and there's not one
of us who doesn't need the cleansing power of
that healing stream. The Church's task in
every generation is to bring this Good News to
everyone who would be made whole.

"See, the streams of living water,
Springing from eternal love,
Well supply thy sons and daughters,
And all fear of want remove."

So we sing, but do we really experience this activity of God? There's so much that drags us down today, down to the cynicism of a world that says: "There is no power to counter the crippling forces that assail us -- the brutal accidents that strike down the ones we love, the malignant germs that seem beyond the control of God or man, the crimes that cripple the community we live in, the violence that explodes anywhere at any time. We can't make sense of it all. There's nothing to do but curl up in our own shell and grab what gives us some comfort and shelter from the storm." To such a mood the Good News can sound like clutching at a straw, and the voice of the Church announcing the healing activity of God in Christ a mere trickle of fading hope. But then, to the waiting and expectant comes this sound of many waters, the cleansing stream -- the healing waters of Bethesda, the water of baptism, the water that flowed with the blood of Jesus offering himself on the cross for us all, the water that satisfies the inward thirst. "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus asked the cripple. Strange question -- yet how close to us. Do you want to be healed, or would you rather sink back to the embrace of cynicism and despair? It is when we truly want whatever healing God sees we need (which isn't always what we think it is) that we are able to sing again with conviction:

"Plenteous grace with thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin,
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within.

Thou of life the fountain art,
Freely let me take of thee;
Spring thou up within my heart,
Rise to all eternity."

~~And that, you say, is the perfect place.~~