

Do You Want to be Made Well?

John 5:1-9

Jewish law stated that all devout Jews living within 16 miles of Jerusalem were required to come to the city to celebrate the three high holy days of Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles each year. Anyone living beyond 16 miles was required to attend at least one of these festivals each year. Jesus, being a devout Jew, traveled to the city as often as possible to observe these holy days. Our story does not tell us which of the high holy days Jesus was attending, but we do know where he arrived in the city.

The Sheep Gate was so called because that is where shepherds would drive their animals into the city. The pool adjacent to the gate was convenient for washing the animals prior to taking them to the Temple for sacrifice. The pool at Bethesda was also the place where people with disabilities would wait for the waters to churn in the hope of finding healing. Before you get too excited about sheep and humans bathing together, there was a wall dividing the pool into two separate bodies of water, one for animals and one for humans.

The pool itself was fed by an underground spring. When the spring would overflow, it bubbled up causing a disturbance in the waters above. In Jesus' day it was believed that this rippling of the water was caused

by fluttering angel wings, therefore the first person to make their way into the rippling waters would be cured of their ailments.

While people waited for the waters to churn, they rested in the porticos that surrounded the pool. The porticos perhaps gave some relief from the elements as people patiently waited for the waters to roil. But once the waters became active, there would be a mad scramble to be the first into the healing waters. It is into this scene that Jesus arrives in our story.

There would have been many people waiting by the pool, yet Jesus singles out one man. We are not told what in particular captured Jesus' attention, but we do know that this man had been incapacitated for 38 years, likely his entire life. For those 38 years he had been coming to the pool in hopes of healing. Perhaps as a child his parents would bring him to the pool and attempt to get him into the water. As he grew older, maybe his parents would drop him off in the morning and then come back later in the day to take him home. He tells Jesus that he has no one to help him into the water, so perhaps by this time his parents were dead.

Knowing that the man has been coming to the pool for 38 years and has no one to help him, Jesus asks a question. "Do you want to be made well?" I can almost hear the man answering in today's vernacular, "Well, duh?!" His inner dialogue going something like this, "Do I want to be made well? Why have I been coming here, painfully dragging my

body over these stone steps, these many years? Of course, I want to be made well!”

This reminded me of something I once heard a speaker say, that while we all talk about change, none of us likes going through change. This begs the question, does this man REALLY want to be made well? After 38 years, which by his own admission have been futile, with no possible cure in sight, why does he persist? Doing the same thing, the same way, for so long, has not brought about the desired healing he says he seeks.

Could it be that he was comfortable with his lot? Those gathered around the pool day after day had likely become his friends, his support system. The routine was comfortable, if not comforting. What would he be expected to do if he was made well? This was the only way of life he knew. Did he see himself as others did, as an invalid? Someone who was “in-valid”, a non-person? How would he cope if he were suddenly made well and became a “real” person?

He doesn't have long to think about that because Jesus in that moment tells him to “Get up! Take up your mat and walk.” And he does, much to the consternation of the religious leaders because this healing happened on the Sabbath. In the verses following what was already read, the Pharisees found the man carrying his mat and they stopped him to ask why he was breaking Sabbath laws. He told them the man who healed him told him to take up his mat, which he did. When asked to

identify who had healed him, the man was not able to do so since Jesus had slipped away in the crowd.

What are we to make of this story? There are a few things, I think we can take away from here:

Jesus wants us to be made well. There are multiple stories in the Bible of Jesus healing people – people He knew and people He didn't know, or who knew him. He cared as much about the outward condition of people's lives as He did their inward lives. There are the stories of Jesus healing in the synagogue, the woman touching the hem of his cloak, responding to the cries of the blind. Take note, though, that the healings done by Jesus don't always involve faith on the part of those healed – the centurion's slave, the Syrophenician woman's daughter, the man at the pool by the Sheep Gate. Jesus made these people well and His care for His people continues. He can make us well, too.

Jesus can make us well in ways we don't expect. The man at the pool of Bethesda expected that the only way to be healed was to be the first to dip into the rippling waters of the pool. In his wildest dreams it is likely he never expected to have a stranger speak a word to him and have 38 years of disability disappear in an instant. John Calvin has said of Jesus, "how far His goodness exceeds the narrowness of our faith." Beyond our human understanding and hope, Jesus makes people well. In faith,

we need to look for the unexpected ways in which Christ can make us well. Even more well than we can imagine!

Jesus can make us well, even if we have to wait. The man in today's story had waited 38 years to be healed, a very long time for one person to suffer. This was not a temporary illness, like the flu, this was a life-limiting disability. We can understand why he was lacking in hope after all those years. We, too, may have been waiting for healing, either for ourselves or someone we love. Patience is the key as we wait for healing to happen. Granted patience is not easy to come by. It's like a muscle that needs to be exercised in order to build it up. Yet, we should not give up, never close the door to what healing and/or new life possibilities may come our way. Jesus may choose to move us out of our comfort zones to affect our healing, but healing will come. We may be surprised that our healing comes through our waiting.

So, a question for you today. What is the healing that you are waiting for? What's holding you back or holding you down? Is your need for healing due to something you have done or something that has been done to you? What is holding you back from being made well? Are you trying to do the same thing over and over, with the exact same results? What are you holding onto that is holding you back? Is it grief? Is it a bad habit that is negatively impacting your health, but you are unwilling to give it up?

Look to Jesus for healing. He not only wants to make you well, He will make you well, if you seek His aid. Like the man by the pool, the healing may not come in the manner you expect but be assured healing will come. This is the Good News of the Gospel, that Jesus has come into the world that we may have life and have it abundantly. AMEN

Lynne McMullan Allebach

May 29, 2022 Hatfield Church of the Brethren