

“Tomorrow Is Not Soon Enough”
John 5:2-9 2016

For most of the 19th Century, no one knew or could find the location of the pool of Beth-Zatha anywhere in the city of Jerusalem. Bible skeptics of that era used claimed that as evidence proving that the author of the Gospel of John was not familiar with layout of ancient Jerusalem. So the Gospel couldn't have been written by the Apostle John and that miracle probably never actually happened anyway. But then in 1888, while workers were doing some excavating during a restoration project at the church of St. Anne, which is just down from the old Temple site in Jerusalem, they unexpectedly uncovered the pool of Beth-zatha complete with its spring-fed pool and five porticoes, **exactly as John described it in his gospel.**

vs. 2

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

The pool with its five porticoes was located just down from the Temple area, which was a convenient place for the sick to beg for alms. Also, according to popular legend, periodically an angel would stir the water of the pool, and the first one in the water would be cured of any ailment, and so the sick and infirm would gather there and wait. In the John text, Jesus is on his way to the Temple in Jerusalem, and notices a man lying there, who had been waiting 38 years.

vs. 6

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?”

“Do you want to be made well?”

That may seem like a strange and impertinent question to ask but really goes much deeper than just healing of the body. In the Greek, what is translated as “made well” is from the same root that we also get the word “hygiene”. The ancient world understood and made a connection between being made well and being made clean or whole, which in Scripture means living well as God intends..... .. i.e. fully realizing one's God-given potential and blessings. When Jesus asks, “Do you want to be made well?” it's a much larger & deeper question than just physical healing. Jesus was really asking, is this how you want your life to be, are

you satisfied with the direction that your life is going, and are you living out the richness & blessing given by God? Do you want to be cleansed, made whole and healed in all those dark places where you have been hurt, damaged & wounded? You can hold onto your brokenness and excuses, and you can let disappointments, resentments & failings fester. On a strictly literal level, the question almost seems foolish. Having been 38 years, that's 13, 680 days waiting to be healed, "yes, of course I want to be made well, sooner the better, of course I want to be healed & start walking immediately! Yet surprisingly, that's not how he responded at all:

vs. 7

The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me."

Instead of a fervent plea for immediate healing, he bemoans his predicament, and offers excuses for still being lame. - It's the fault of those who haven't done enough to help me. - It's the fault of those who got in the pool ahead of me. - It's the fault of the system's unfairness that has failed me for all these many years. * **The man is frozen in place by his victimhood and assumptions.** Believing that his healing could come only from the pool, he assumed nothing could be done to change his situation. The man is frozen in a hopeless stagnation of helplessness. Maybe over time his helplessness led to hopeless despair, **and so he acclimated to accepting his illness as familiar, manageable and comfortable...** ... after all, if he were to be made well and whole, he'd be responsible, and more would be expected of him. **Sometimes weariness, disappointment, stress or discouragement can cause us to accept, or settle in and hunker down. We learn to manage our expectations and any sense of hope, and even doubt the possibility that God might have more for us, and so we fear anything new or risky, restraining the unexpected**

During the American Civil War, the Army of the Potomac set up camp just outside Wash. DC. Occasionally they'd march toward Richmond for a battle, be easily defeated, and then return to their encampment. As the various Union Generals came and went, each time the army would head into battle, lose, and return. With every defeat they would come back to Washington DC, and make a few more improvements to their encampment. But when General Grant finally took command, he ordered their encampment burned entirely before they left. He wanted to make it very clear, no excuses or explanations, they would not be allowed to return defeated. The creature comforts of the encampment back home, would not be an enticement against their progress & victory... ... **their days of defeat and settling back were over and done...** ... **there'd be no laying around the pool**

of Beth-zatha just waiting. When Jesus came to the man at the Pool of Beth-zatha he offered that man gifts or grace, healing and hope. The man didn't ask for it, and he makes no statement of faith, but Jesus finds and notices, offering wholeness. The man whines about the unfairness of his life, but Jesus ignores his griping and complaining, heals and calls him to radical change and hope.

Vs. 8

"Stand up, take your mat, and walk" It's a simple offer -- "you want to be made well?"

then get moving, if you really want your life made whole.

vs. 9

At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Healed and made whole, he does what Jesus commanded. But suppose he was afraid or unwilling not to get up and be healed. **He could have refused to believe or accept the grace of healing.** He could have stayed in the familiar security of where he was. Jesus gave him freedom and power to decide. He was free to accept, or to reject as he chose. - **just as we decide, and we are free to choose, and do not have to keep repeating the same patterns of failure again & again.**

Regrettably, sometimes we forget, doubt or choose to ignore that we are more than our circumstances, mistakes or failures, that we do have real choices we can make, that we can let Jesus change our life, and allow the Holy Spirit to guide how we live. This story is a lesson about God's grace. A helpless and hopeless man is being offered a new life, and he is free to choose how he will respond... just as Jesus asks each of us to choose, again and again to go further, "**Do you want to be made well?**" "**Then stand up, take up your mat and walk, follow me.**" This is our call to a life of purpose, usefulness, & faithfulness, and to live out our most deeply held beliefs and values and to receive the joy & abundant blessings as God intends. Are there hidden places and areas of my life and faith practices, where I have chosen complacency, compromise, and easy comfort? **Or maybe I've simply forgotten what a close and growing walk with Jesus really feels like.** We are promised in

Romans 8:37

In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.

But does that Scripture ring true to the way I am living each day, does that really describe how I am choosing to live my life?, -and how much more than conquerors have I been experiencing lately? Isn't it time to seek after the truth and promises of God?

At the end of the movie, "When Harry Met Sally", the character played by Billy Crystal suddenly realizes that he is in love with the character played by Meg Ryan. So he immediately runs, and barges in to where he knows she is and declares his undying love for her. She looks at him like he is crazy, and she angrily objects, that this is hardly an appropriate place or time, and totally inappropriate for him to be declaring his love... to which he responds with a truly wonderful line: **when you finally discover that you are in love with someone, that you want to spend the rest of your life with that someone, then you want the rest of your life with that someone, to begin as soon as possible.** God intends good and blessings for each of us, for our relationship through grace to be vibrant and wonderful.

So, what is limiting, delaying and holding back my walk of faith? How could I draw nearer now, and be more open to the blessing and goodness Jesus intends? For surely, tomorrow is not soon enough to get started. "Do you want to be made well", do you want to be whole?

When the Holy Spirit speaks, waiting until tomorrow won't do, and sometime later on is definitely not soon enough! So as we come to Communion today for God's grace and blessings, tomorrow just won't do, and later on is not soon enough!