

Exodus 8:1-10 (New Revised Standard Version)

Then the Lord said to Moses, “Go to Pharaoh and say to him, ‘Thus says the Lord: Let my people go, so that they may worship me. If you refuse to let them go, I will plague your whole country with frogs. The river shall swarm with frogs; they shall come up into your palace, into your bedchamber and your bed, and into the houses of your officials and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your officials.’” And the Lord said to Moses, “Say to Aaron, ‘Stretch out your hand with your staff over the rivers, the canals, and the pools, and make frogs come up on the land of Egypt.’” So Aaron stretched out his hand over the waters of Egypt; and the frogs came up and covered the land of Egypt. But the magicians did the same by their secret arts, and brought frogs up on the land of Egypt. Then Pharaoh called Moses and Aaron, and said, “Pray to the Lord to take away the frogs from me and my people, and I will let the people go to sacrifice to the Lord.” Moses said to Pharaoh, “Kindly tell me when I am to pray for you and for your officials and for your people, that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile.” And he said, “Tomorrow.” Moses said, “As you say! So that you may know that there is no one like the Lord our God.

John 5:2-9, 16 (New Revised Standard Version)

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. 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?” 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.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath.

Since no one could identify where the pool of Beth-Zatha was,

Bible skeptics of the 18th & 19th centuries used that as evidence

that obviously the author of the Gospel of John

was not familiar with layout of ancient Jerusalem...

... so it couldn't have been written by the Apostle John,

and most likely the miracle never actually happened anyway.

But in 1888, during a restoration project at the church of St. Anne,

which is just down the hill 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. 2-3

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.

In those days, 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 & infirm would gather there, to wait & hope.

In the John text, Jesus is on his way up to the Temple in Jerusalem.

He notices a man lying there, who had waited 38 years. vs. 5-6

One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 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?" ... a strange question to ask a lame man,

but really it goes much deeper than just healing of the body,

and it's at the heart of the passage we heard read today...

... it's about being made whole – being restored.

More than just good health, it is to fulfill our God-given potential,

it's to be within God purpose, the blessings God intends for us,
it's a profound wholeness that fits our God-given uniqueness.

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 and 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?

Here is the challenge, **the good** that God desires and intends for me,

am I convinced, and do I truly believe and fully trust
that it really is what I most want & desire to work toward?

I know that if I let God have his way with me entirely,

then some things of my life will surely have to change,
and though it's all good according to God's will and purpose,

it's not necessarily pleasant, comfortable or easy for me.

So do I really trust and desire **that good according to God,**

is that really the good that I most want for me?

Do I trust that my life would be better if I'd submit more to the Lord?

Be careful how you answer that ... b/c change isn't always entirely delightful.

When Jesus asks me, "Do you want to be made well?",

that means letting go of my resentments, my excuses, my anger,

my bitterness & unforgiveness, self-centeredness, my guilt,

my prejudice, my arrogance, complacency, laziness & regrets-

to be made well, **is not necessarily very pleasant, comfortable or easy.**

On a strictly literal level, the question Jesus asked seems obvious.

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 **and start walking immediately!**

Do you recall at the end of the movie, "When Harry Met Sally"?,

and the character played by Billy Crystal

suddenly realizes that he is in love with Meg Ryan's character.

So he immediately runs to where he knows

that she is celebrating at a New Year's party.

He barges in. He finds her 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.

Yes, but that's not how the lame man 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."

Notice that he doesn't say, "Please help me and heal me right away",

but bemoans his predicament, offering 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,

and that this is as good as his life can possibly ever be.

The man is frozen in a hopeless stagnation of self-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, self-pity or discouragement

can cause us to accept or settle in, resist change and hunker down.

We learn to manage our expectations and surrender any sense of hope,

and even doubt the possibility that God might have more for us,

so we fear anything new or risky, **and restrain the unexpected.**

When Jesus came to the man at the Pool of Beth-zatha

he offered that man gifts of grace, healing and hope.

The man didn't ask for it, and he makes no statement of faith,

but Jesus finds him and notices, and he offers healing wholeness.

The man whines about the unfairness of his life,

but Jesus ignores his griping and complaining, vs. 8-9, 16

Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." **At once** the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath.

How unfortunate that the indignant religious leaders objected,

and that their sense of appropriate on the Sabbath **was so limited**,

as to ignore a miraculous healing standing in front of them,

and so God's call for compassion slipped right past them.

In the early 1970's when the 'Walk for Mankind' was first organized,

it was a compassionate effort to raise money for food,

to feed the world's most needy, impoverished & starving.

I remember, as a young Christian, how excited my friends and I were

that our faith and idealism would finally be put into action

to do something solid and that would actually help

put food in the mouths of hungry & starving children.

The Walk for Mankind was along a twenty-one mile course

so we would be walking past checkpoints for most of the day,

and we were offering to God, our time and tired feet,

in faithful compassion, to feed God's hungry world.

But I also recall, there were some strong and vocal objections

that the walk was on Sunday, which meant we'd be missing church...

... though as a somewhat cynical, fervent and rebellious teenager,

I didn't see how anyone could possibly think or believe

that it was better to pray for the hungry and starving,

than to actually do something for the hungry & starving.

I do hope that I still have some of that rebellious spirit & passion.

It's a simple offer -- "you want to be made well?"

If so 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'd been afraid or unwilling 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,
or keep blaming other people or the system that failed him.

Jesus gave him freedom and power, an opportunity to decide.

He was free to accept, or to reject as he chose.

**- just as we have to decide, and we are free to choose,
and do not have to keep repeating over and over
the same patterns of failure again and again.**

This story is a lesson and challenge concerning God's grace.

A helpless and hopeless man is being offered a new life,
and he is entirely 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."

That is our call to a life of purpose, usefulness and faithfulness,

and to receive the joy and 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?

Wounded acceptance isn't being whole or **maybe I've simply forgotten
what a close, authentic & growing walk with Jesus really feels like.**

As Paul wrote, and as 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?

**Wouldn't today be a good day to move closer
toward the healing and wholeness that Jesus promised?**

I received a letter from our health insurance company one time,
with instructions to mail our prescriptions to a company in AZ,
who would fill them by return mail in a couple of weeks or so,
rather than having them filled at our local pharmacy.

I didn't respond well to that program to save a little money.

You see, if I am sick, suffering or in pain,

and if there is a medication that will help me ...

... I'm not willing to wait a couple weeks or more,

just to save a few bucks on that prescription.

A similar issue came up with Pharaoh in the Exodus text we heard.

Try to imagine living this scene Moses explained, vs. 2-4

I will plague your whole country with frogs. The river shall swarm with frogs; they shall come up into your palace, into your bedchamber and your bed, and into the houses of your officials and of your people, and into your ovens and your kneading bowls. The frogs shall come up on you and on your people and on all your officials.

Finally Pharaoh has had enough and asks Moses to get rid of the frogs.

So then Moses asks Pharaoh, vs. 9-10

"... tell me when I am to pray ... that the frogs may be removed from you and your houses and be left only in the Nile."
And Pharaoh said, "Tomorrow."

Tomorrow. **TOMORROW ? !!** Why does Pharaoh want to wait that long?,

willing to spend another whole night, **sleeping with the frogs ?!**

I'm pretty sure I'd have asked Moses, to get rid of the frogs **NOW!**,

in fact, yesterday wouldn't be soon enough,

and tomorrow is definitely way too late !

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 today,
to the full blessings and goodness Jesus intends?,

for surely, tomorrow is not soon enough to get started.

But maybe it really is **a question of trust** --- do I really believe

that good according to God, the wholeness that God intends for me,
is that really what I want, even if it means that I have to change?

"Do you want to be made well", do you want to be made whole?

When the Holy Spirit speaks, waiting until tomorrow won't do,

and sometime later on is definitely not soon enough for me!