

Is This Really Good Enough?  
John 5:2-11 2024

John 5:2-11 (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. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’”

Since no one could identify where the pool of Beth-Zatha was,  
Bible skeptics of the 18<sup>th</sup> & 19<sup>th</sup> centuries claimed 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 John, the disciple,  
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,  
so the sick & infirm would gather there, to wait & hope,  
at that convenient place along the way to beg for alms.

When I visited that site just down from the Temple area in Jerusalem,  
we read this John 5 passage, then sat in silence with eyes closed,  
and it was most meaningful to envision how this story unfolded.

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.**

A man languishing by the pool for 38 years, that's 328,320 long hours.

Jesus sees more than just sickness, he sees defeat & resignation.  
He notices crushed and atrophied hope, dreams and expectation.

In the Greek, the phrase that's translated as "made well"  
is from the same root that we also get the word "hygiene",  
which means far more than just healthy and clean.

It's a profound wholeness that fits our God-given uniqueness.

More than just good health, it is to fulfill our God-given potential.  
It is to be within God purpose and blessings as God intends for us.

When Jesus asks, "Do you want to be made well?", or be made whole,  
he 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 full richness & blessing given by God?

To be made whole, healed and well means for Jesus to shine his Light  
into all those dark places where we've been hurt, damaged & wounded,  
or holding onto excuses & **letting resentments & failings fester**.

Being truly made well or whole doesn't happened all at once,  
but is a lifetime process of exposing our wounds and brokenness,  
confronting even our worst and most extreme failures and flaws,  
so that through the Spirit Jesus will cleanse, heal & restore.

It reminds me of when  
after a motorcycle incident one time, I had a deep wound on my leg,  
which I kept trying to ignore, even as I could see it getting worse.

Finally the hurt & soreness got to be too much and I went to a doctor,  
who painfully scraped and sliced away the badly damaged flesh,  
and only after enduring all that, could my leg begin to heal,  
and so 50 years later, the scar remains, in case I forget.

When Jesus asks me, "Do you want to be made well?", or be made whole,  
that means letting go of my resentments, my excuses and anger,  
my bitterness & unforgiveness, self-centeredness and guilt,  
my prejudice, my arrogance, complacency, laziness & regrets.  
I have to open it all to the healing light of God's grace and love.

On a strictly literal level, the question Jesus asked seems obvious.  
Having been 38 years, that's 13, 680 days of 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, and please do it now,  
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.

After 38 years, he's used to it, and he knows what to expect.

**The man has been frozen in place by his victimhood & disappointment.**

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 could possibly be.

He is locked into a hopeless stagnation of defeated helplessness.

Maybe over time his helplessness has led to crushed & broken despair,  
**and so he acclimated to accepting his illness & struggle  
as familiar, manageable and unchanging with few demands...**

... after all, if he were to be made well, healed and whole,  
he'd be responsible, and more might be expected of him.

**Sometimes weariness, disappointment, stress and discouragement  
can cause us to accept, or settle in , surrender and hunker down.**

But when Jesus came to the man at the Pool of Beth-zatha  
he offered that man gifts of grace, healing and hope.

This story in John's gospel is really a description of God's grace.

The man never asks for healing, and makes no statements of faith.  
Jesus finds and notices the man, he offers him wholeness & hope.

The man whines about the unfairness of his life,  
but Jesus ignores his griping and complaining,  
he 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?"

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.

By grace, Jesus gave him freedom and power 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.**

Regrettably, sometimes we forget, doubt or even ignore the Truth,

that we are much more than our circumstances, mistakes & failures,  
that we do have real choices that we can make,  
that we can let Jesus change and heal our life,  
and allow the Holy Spirit to guide how we live.

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 decide how he will choose to respond...

... just as Jesus asks each of us to decide, to make our choice,  
again and again to go further, "**Do you want to be made well?**"  
"**Then stand up, take up your mat and walk, follow me.**"  
Same lesson as last week, "abide in me as I abide in you ..."

That is our call to a life of purpose, usefulness and faithfulness,  
and to receive the joy, meaning & abundant blessings as God intends,  
to be delivered from the paralysis of my past, my baggage of guilt.

Trust, for Jesus is in the business of gracious love and healing,  
and creating new possibilities, change **that starts from within.**

That raises a critical question before us today,  
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.

**more than conquerors** through him who loves us  
But does that promise ring true with the way I am living each day,  
does that really describe how I am choosing to live out my life?  
How much more than conquerors have I been experiencing lately?

**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 today and be more open now,  
to the full blessings and goodness Jesus intends?,  
**for surely, tomorrow is not soon enough to get started.**

**When the Holy Spirit speaks and nudges,  
later on or maybe tomorrow is definitely not soon enough!**

**So as we come to Communion today for God's grace and blessings,  
say, "Yes Lord, starting right now please move me toward wholeness,  
and from deeply within, transform me toward the best you intend.**

As Paul writes in Philippians 3:20-21, as paraphrased in *The Message*,

God can do anything you know - far more than you could ever imagine or guess or request in your wildest dreams! He does it not by pushing us around but by working within us, his Spirit deeply and gently within us.