

Throughout the gospels, we find stories of Jesus healing people of various diseases and physical ailments. Since our Wednesday Night Class is studying the Gospel of John, this morning let's look at one of His miracles that is recorded in the fifth chapter of John, the first nine verses.

Read John 5:1-9

On the issue of proper health care, I found a story of a little boy who came running out of the bathroom screaming. He ran to his mother and told her that he had dropped his toothbrush in the toilet. His mother fished the toothbrush out of the toilet and threw it in the garbage. The boy watched carefully as his mother did this. Then he ran into his mother's bathroom and came back with her toothbrush. He held the toothbrush up for his mother to see and then said: "We had better throw this one away too; it fell in the toilet a few days ago."

In our story this morning, Jesus arrives in Jerusalem. Now instead of spending all His time in the Temple, Jesus was out among the people meeting their needs. He went to the pool called Bethesda which in ancient times was a kind of spa where healing was thought to take place. The pool was deep enough to swim in and was fed by a spring that occasionally bubbled up. The people believed that this disturbance or bubbling of the water was caused by an angel, and that the first person to step into the pool after the disturbance would be healed of any illness from which they were suffering.

The word Bethesda means "House of Mercy;" thus, this pool was a place where God showed mercy toward the sick and those in need. Notice that the Apostle John identifies three specific groups of sick people lying around the pool waiting for the water to move – the blind, the lame and the paralyzed; those who were least able to help themselves get into the water; those who had waited the longest for a cure. John tells us that one particular man had been there for 38 years, lying beside the pool waiting for his chance.

Verse 6 says that when Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been there for a long time, Jesus asked him: "Do you want to get well?" Notice the three verbs in this verse: Jesus saw, Jesus knew, and Jesus said. Jesus sees each of our needs; He knows the depth of that need; and He is more than willing to address our particular need.

Do you want to get well? Now this seems like a strange question to ask this man considering that he had lain by the pool for 38 long years waiting to be cured. Jesus knew that this was the man's greatest need. But He also wanted the man to admit his own helplessness and his desperate need for healing. It is the same with our salvation. The Lord knows that we desperately need to be saved, but He wants to hear the confession from our own lips that we are lost, that we need Him and that we accept Him as our Lord and Savior. God wants the best

for all His children, however, He will neither heal nor save us against our will; it must be our personal decision; this is where God's amazing gift of freewill comes in.

In a way this question was not as strange as it may have sounded. The man had waited for 38 years and it might well have been that he had lost all hope of ever being cured. How many times had his hope been raised only to see someone else get into the water first and he had to crawl back to his corner? Think of the emotional roller coaster that this man had been on for those 38 long years? You know, it can get downright discouraging when your doctor can't find a cure for what's ailing you; when weeks, months, and even years go by and your health does not improve.

Or it could have been that deep down this man might have been content to remain as he was; for if he had been cured, then his life would have changed. Begging was the only way that he knew how to make a living, and remember unlike most of the healing miracles performed by Jesus as recorded in the gospels; this man had not asked Jesus to heal him. Jesus' question could be put another way: "Do you really want to change?"

Two men were fishing one Sunday morning on a lake. They saw a man walking along the shore, and one of the men said: "That guy looks just like Jesus." "Oh, it can't be," said the other man. So, they rowed over to the shore and asked the man if he was really Jesus, and He replied that He was. The first man said: "Well, Lord, I have arthritis bad in my shoulder, can you heal me?" "Certainly, my son," Jesus replied as He touched the man's shoulder. The man was immediately healed with no pain in his shoulder. Then Jesus turned and looked at the other man who shouted: "Don't touch me, I'm on 100 percent disability!" Unfortunately, there are those who don't want to feel the healing touch of the Master; those who do not want to change.

Are we like this? How would we answer Jesus' question – do you want to get well? We hear His promises and in a way we believe. Yet, here we are the same as we were before, never changing. Why? Because we really don't want what we say we want or what we really need – the healing touch of Jesus in our lives. We just give Him lip service and don't really mean that we want to change.

Now this man answered quickly, but his response to Jesus' question was very similar to how Nicodemus had responded to Jesus' offer to be born again, with some doubt that this was even possible. This man interpreted Jesus' question through his own preconceived notion about how the healing could be accomplished. He thought that he could only be cured by getting into the water first; after all, getting into the water had been his focus for 38 years. So his response indicated that he didn't really have much faith in Jesus. How often do we miss out on the healing power of Jesus in our lives because we restrict His ability to our limited imagination? We think that because we can't do something, then certainly Jesus can't do it. However, in

Matthew 19:26, Jesus said: "With man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible." We must never underestimate the healing power of the Lord in our lives!

Notice what the man says in response to Jesus' question: "Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred." I have no one to help me! What a sad statement! What a sad commentary on this man's life, and unfortunately, many lives today. In loneliness they have no one to help them, or no one who seems to care about them. How many times had the priests and other well-meaning people passed by this man without offering to help? But not so with Jesus; He always comes when needed and offers help.

When all hope seems lost and when we seem to be at the end of our rope, there's Jesus standing there with His outstretched arms ready to embrace us and welcome us into His loving care. Jesus is always a friend to the friendless, and a helper for those who have no apparent earthly help. Remember the words of the beautiful hymn we just sang: "What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer! O what peace we often forfeit, O what needless pain we bear, all because we do not carry everything to God in prayer."

As His church, we are called to be the arms and hearts that care for those who feel like this man beside the pool who had no one to help him. As a community of faith, Galatians 6:2 tell us to carry each other's burdens. So, as we enter the holiday season, I encourage you to be aware of those around us who are feeling that no one cares like this man; be aware of the need to show the love of Jesus Christ to those who are hurting through your prayers, your words and definitely your actions. We are called to be the hands and feet in service for Jesus Christ.

Jesus responds to the man's doubts with three commands: "Stand up, take up your mat, and walk." Jesus told him to do three things that were vital for his healing. First, he was to "get up." Sometimes Jesus would take the person who He was healing by their hand and lift them to their feet. But in this case, Jesus insisted that this man who had suffered so long in pain get up by himself. It was essential that the man demonstrate his faith in Jesus to heal him. And the instant that he made the slightest effort in response in faith, the healing power surged through his body like electricity. His crippled and distorted limbs were straightened and he rose to his feet. We too must have faith that Jesus can heal us and that He wants the best for us.

The second thing that Jesus told the man to do was to pick up his mat. I don't know about you but the first thing that came to my mind when I read this was now that the man was cured, why did he still need that filthy old mat on which he had laid for so many years? But the man's mat represented his former condition of helplessness and hopelessness. As long as it remained on the ground, it beckoned him to come back, to submerge himself again in his state of helplessness and self-pity. So Jesus is saying: "Pick up that thing! Roll it up! You will not be

needing it anymore. Don't leave it here as a reminder of your past. Destroy the evidence of that previous part of your life." In this passage, Jesus is also saying to us that if God is willing to forget our past sins – to cast them as far from Him as the east is from the west, then He wants us to do the same, to turn over a new leaf. We must forgive ourselves just as God has forgiven us, move forward, and not dwell on our past.

The third command that Jesus gave this man was: "Walk!" He was not just asking him to walk around on the porch and demonstrate his new found ability to move about. Rather, Jesus meant: "Walk away from here! Leave this place, this scene of your hopelessness behind you. I have given you a new lease on life. Live the abundant life that I have promised you."

Jesus says get up. In order to be cured of whatever is preventing us from living the life that God intended for us, we need to do our part, take some action such as getting the necessary medical treatment, taking our medicine as prescribed, eating right, exercising daily, breaking old habits, changing who we associate with, restoring broken relationships, and getting help for our addictions. Of course, we can all add to this list, but I think you see where I'm going. Jesus is always reaching out to help us, but He expects us to respond in faith and do our part.

Imagine the man's reaction and feelings as he hears Jesus tell him to get up and walk; walk for the first time in 38 years. The man had to be thinking, will my legs be strong enough; will I be able to keep my balance; will I be able to stand up after all these years? But remember Jesus never tells anyone to do something without giving them the power to do it. Even as Jesus spoke, new life and power flowed into and through this man's body. He was immediately healed and stood up and walked. The healing that this man had sought in the water of the pool, he found in Jesus Christ Himself.

So, the question for each one of us this morning is – do you want to get well? Some of us are suffering from physical pain and ailments this morning. Periodically, we will offer the opportunity for those of you who are willing to come forward following the service to receive an anointing with oil and prayers for your illness or for a loved one or friend. Of course, I can't heal you and this is in no way a substitute for proper medical care. But we will lift up your concern to the Lord in prayer, and as James 5:16 tells us: "The prayer of the faithful is powerful and effective." And God can heal us! So, if you are willing, please come join me at the end of the service.

But we are not just talking about physical ailments. There are many other things that are negatively impacting our lives that we need to be healed of. We need Christ's help in getting rid of these obstructions so that we can live the life God intended for us to live; a life filled with happiness, joy, and peace of mind that only Jesus can give us. What's separating you from truly

experiencing Jesus' presence in your life today? Jesus comes to us as we lie on our mat and tells us to get up, forget our past, and walk with Him in faith.

As with the man beside the pool, Jesus meets us at the point of our need and seeks to move us closer to Him. He may not cure our physical pains and problems immediately, but He will give us the strength and ability to keep going until He finally calls us home. Like our previous hymn *Spirit Song* says: "O let the Son of God enfold you with His Spirit and His love. Let Him fill your heart and satisfy your soul. O let Him have the things that hold you, and His Spirit like a dove will descend upon your life and make you **whole**."

Do you want to get well; then get up and walk in faith with your Lord and Savior; He is the Master Physician and He always wants the best for you. Amen