**DO YOU WANT TO GET WELL?**

Text John 5: 1-15

Growing up in a Christian home, I always heard, “No working on Sunday! We go to church and then it’s a day of rest.” I’m not sure if we always followed that quote but it was at least a good thought. Today’s scripture lesson provides some context to the first century Jewish laws that may support that idea but you are going to have to come back another Sunday for that discussion. Today, I want to ask you a question, but its not my question, Its Jesus’ question. Do you want to get well? What an odd disturbing question to ask. Especially to someone who is disabled or really sick. This may be a disturbing question, but it is a serious question. Not only a question about our physical health but our spiritual wellness as well. And believe it or not there are some in this World today, who would rather lie around, complain about all the negative things that they can think of and keep going on with their own sinful ways.

Charles Shultz, creator of the Peanuts cartoons, on one occasion had Lucy observing… "Charlie Brown, life is like a deck chair." "Like a what?"

"Haven't you ever been on a cruise ship, Charlie Brown? Passengers open up these canvas deck chairs so they can sit in the sun. Some people place their chairs facing the rear of the ship so they can see where they've been. Other people face their chairs forward. They want to see where they're going. On the cruise ship of life, Charlie Brown, which way is you your deck chair facing?" Charlie thinks for a moment and replies: "Gee, I've never been able to get one unfolded." Do you ever feel that way?

We fumble around life every day. Maybe, you have an illness, or are going through a time of depression. Maybe, everything is going wrong for you. Maybe you are battling a terminal illness or a condition that is irreversible. Its easy to just stop fighting and just sit in a pool of pity for yourself. I get it! I’ve been there.

In early 2019 I was struck with a weakness starting to occur in my body. By June of that year, it was very noticeable when I was moving back from out west. What I could lift before, I now was struggling with. I was falling for no apparent reason. When I got back here, I found a doctor and was able to see a PA. I was told It was a quick fix. Take these steroids and you will be back to yourself. It was only when I bought a house in November of that year and as I was painting, I got down on the floor and couldn’t get myself up. I would try to get to a couch or chair to grab on too but nothing worked. Being alone, I became frightened, scared, and would sit and cry. I would make a call to my cousin who would come over and help me get up to my feet. From that point on, I knew I had to see a real doctor. After a referral to a specialist in Pittsburgh, and an immediate hospitalization, It was found that a Cholesterol medication that I had taken for 15 plus years had broken down my muscles in my body. A condition known as Necrotizing myopathy, and Statin-induced myositis. My CPK # was over 11,000 Normal is 300. So, 6 years later I’m still doing monthly infusions. I get it! Hours of prayers and conversations with God, I knew I had to stand up and walk forward. There was no more looking back. God’s grace was with me, and I had to move forward. I had to trust God in all of this that he had a plan for me. I may not have been healed completely but I know he had a purpose for me.

As we work our way through the gospel of John, we come to this 3rd sign or miracle that Jesus performs. First, it was Water to wine, then the Samaritan women at the well, and now a healing at the pool of Bethesda.

 Our Scripture lesson today, tells the story of Jesus at the pool of Bethesda. Isn’t it ironic that It is from the name of this pool that we get the name of our great naval hospital in Maryland, Bethesda Naval Hospital. Bethesda means “House of Mercy.” In ancient times this area was considered to be a hospital without walls. People with physical ailments would come to this pool to be healed. So, here we see a man lying on a mat by the pool and a stranger approaches him and ask the question “Do you want to get well?” Now if someone would have asked that question to me back in 2019, I might have had some harsh words for them. What an unusual question to ask someone with a physical disability. And notice the response the man gives. “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down in front of me.” Does that sound familiar? In our everyday struggles there are always those excuses, or barriers that we tend to revert to. Then, Notice what Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” The man was healed instantly. I get it! It was no doubt that the grace of God came to that man in that instance. The ironic thing here is that the man didn’t know Jesus. And why him? There were hundreds if not thousands at that pool. Why did Jesus pick him? I believe that Jesus picked him to set an example. Jesus works in mysterious ways. You never know when or where he is going to show up. It may be what we expect or it may be something that we are not ready for.

William Willimon the Methodist Bishop, shares a story in his book on pastoral care. Willimon was paying a visit to a woman in his church who had just delivered a baby. When Willimon got to the hospital room, the wife and husband were anxiously awaiting word from the doctor. They had just received the “ominous news that ‘there were problems with the birth.” When the doctor arrived, he told the couple that the child had been born with Down syndrome, but he also had a minor and correctible respiratory condition and the child was on a respirator. He said, “My recommendation is for you to consider just letting nature take its course, and allow me to take him off the respirator, and then in a few days there shouldn’t be a problem.” The child would die “naturally” if they just left things as they were. The couple was confused and asked why they shouldn’t fix the problem. The doctor looked at them and said that raising a Down syndrome child would create enormous amounts of stress in the marriage, and that studies showed that many parents of Down syndrome children separated or divorced. He then said, “Is it fair to you to bring this sort of suffering upon your other two children?”

At the word suffering, the wife suddenly seemed to understand. She countered that her children had lived a safe and comfortable life with every advantage in the world. They had known, if anything, too little of suffering and the difficulty of life in the world. The woman said to the doctor: suffering she said? We are Christians, we appreciate your concerns. God suffered for us, so we will try to suffer for the baby if we must. She spoke of “God’s hand” and said, “I could certainly see why it would make sense for a child like this to be born into a family like ours. Our children will do just fine. When you think about it, it could be a great opportunity.”

Ephesians 2:8-9 states, "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast,"

Isn’t it by the grace of God that we can live knowing that not everything is going to be perfect, or the way we want it to be. There are going to be tough times, but as Christians we put our hope and trust in Jesus Christ to see us through everything we encounter. As I often use the benediction by Richard Halverson “You go nowhere by accident, wherever you go, God is sending you. Wherever you are, God has put you there. He has a purpose of you being there. Christ lives in you and has something he wants to do through you where you are. Believe this, and go in the grace and love and power of Jesus Christ.” This speaks volumes of how we should live out our lives. God has a mysterious way that he works, and we never know when or where he is going to show up.

The man's willingness to obey Jesus's command, despite his physical limitations and the seeming impossibility of the task, is presented as a model of trust. Trust of a stranger that he didn’t even know.

When I don’t understand God’s ways, I have to cling to God’s worth that he is good even when the times aren’t. We’ve all been there. We’ve all asked the question why Lord? Why me? We need to trust God that he has a plan for us. It may not be the perfect plan that we expect, but he will see us through it. I love verse 14. “Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

So, in closing, let me address two broader points that are being address in this reading today. First, the confrontation and controversy. We see Jesus claiming the equality with God, but also shows the growing opposition to the Jewish religious leaders. There is no doubt that this conflict will lead to Jesus’s crucifixion. Second, Eternal life and the Father’s work. We see the relationship between Jesus and the Father. If you continue on reading verses 16-18 Jesus said to them: “My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.” This was all the more why they tried and killed Jesus because he was not only working on the Sabbath, but he equated himself to God calling him his own Father.

Jesus redefines the meaning of the Sabbath, not as a day of rigid restriction, but as a day for demonstrating God's love and compassion. And I like how Jesus does all of this. He doesn’t come stand on a rock and announce to the crowd, Instead, Jesus simply walks up to one man, the senior beggar who had been visiting the healing waters for 38 years, and asks “Do you want to get well?” This is how God deals with us in our helplessness. So, are you going to pick up your mat and walk? Or are you going to continue laying around in a pool of pity feeling helpless? A-Men