

“Healing at Bethesda”
John 5:1-15
Holiday Island Presbyterian Church
August 19, 2018

5 ²Now there is in Jerusalem by the sheep *gate* a pool, which is called in Hebrew Bethesda, having five porticoes. ³In these lay a multitude of those who were sick, blind, lame, and withered, [waiting for the moving of the waters; ⁴for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool and stirred up the water; whoever then first, after the stirring up of the water, stepped in was made well from whatever disease with which he was afflicted.] ⁵A man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw him lying *there*, and knew that he had already been a long time *in that condition*, He said to him, “Do you wish to get well?” ⁷The sick man answered Him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, but while I am coming, another steps down before me.” ⁸Jesus *said to him, “Get up, pick up your pallet and walk.” ⁹Immediately the man became well, and picked up his pallet and *began* to walk.\

Now it was the Sabbath on that day. ¹⁰So the Jews were saying to the man who was cured, “It is the Sabbath, and it is not permissible for you to carry your pallet.” ¹¹But he answered them, “He who made me well was the one who said to me, ‘Pick up your pallet and walk.’” ¹²They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Pick up *your pallet* and walk’?” ¹³But the man who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had slipped away while there was a crowd in *that place*.¹⁴Afterward Jesus *found him in the temple and said to him, “Behold, you have become well; do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.” ¹⁵The man went away, and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

INTRODUCTION:

The healing at the pool of Bethesda
an account of a man who was paralyzed for 38 years
and one of Jesus’ most well-known miracles.

**Most of the time, people act in predictable ways.
And this man is no different than most.**

**People also seek answers to their problems in predictable ways.
Again, this man is no exception.**

**But, once in a while,
God has a surprise for people.**

**Once in a while,
God intervenes, in a very special way.**

**Once in a while,
God reminds us Who is really in charge by doing something
totally unexpected and completely beyond our experience.**

**God is God, and therefore subject only to God's own rules;
therefore, God's grace may come in different forms.**

**On this day,
Jesus entered Jerusalem through one of the gates;
this one was known as the "Sheep Gate"
because the sheep used for sacrifice in the Temple
were brought through this particular gate.**

**For years, skeptics thought that the name "Bethesda"
was simply fictional; made up by some scribe,
and did not refer to an actual historical location.**

**Then in the 1940s,
archaeologists unearthed some ancient stonework near a pool
and near the Sheep Gate**

bearing the inscription "Bethesda."

Here's something interesting:

Take out your pew Bible and turn to page 96 in the NT.

Take a look at verse 4 – that is right between verse 3 and verse 5.
It's not there, right?

Verse 4 is included in the KJV; and a few other versions,
but in many Bibles, verse 4 appears in small print
as a footnote at the bottom of the page.

In the years since the King James Bible was first published,
scholars have discovered that the earliest and most reliable
manuscripts of the book of John (prior to 400 AD)
do not include the words in verse 4.

It is believed that verse 4 was added sometime later
in order to make sense of what the man said:

"I have no one to put me in the water when it is stirred."

According to legend, from time to time angels would come down
and bathe in the water at Bethesda.

At the precise moment you saw a bubbling in the geothermal water,
it was believed that the first diseased person to enter the pool
would be miraculously healed.

So, the waters of Bethesda were considered a healing shrine,
like the waters of Lourdes in southern France,
and the shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico City.

It was a place of both hope – for those who may have been healed
and a place of despair – for those who were not healed.

Jesus enters the city and goes directly to the pool of Bethesda.

**There He finds people lying all around the pool
who are sick and paralyzed.**

**They have come to this spot because of superstition.
Drawn by the legend of angels stirring the water.**

**They continue to come to this spot out of hope –
- maybe even false hope –
- and a strong sense of keeping up tradition.**

ENCOUNTER WITH THE BEGGAR:

**John records Jesus's encounter with one individual;
a man who was so disabled he could not enter the water.**

**There's a very good chance this individual
would have continued coming here until his dying day
relying upon superstition and legend for healing.**

**It's very likely that, if Jesus hadn't intervened,
nothing would have changed for this man.**

**The man was not searching for Jesus.
Jesus was the furthest thing from his mind.**

Truth be told, the Lord was searching for him.

**There's a basic spiritual truth here.
On our own, by our own reason or strength,
we don't seek the Lord.**

As a matter of fact, we avoid Him.

Until we come to know Jesus – really know Jesus –

**- beyond the stories and myths and legends surrounding Him -
- until we know His Word and His ways**

**It may all seem like foolishness to us
and we cannot understand the spiritual truth behind Jesus.**

**This man's focus was on the pool,
rather than on Jesus, the Messiah.**

**We are not told – and may never know –
why Jesus suddenly stepped into this forlorn community
and approached this one individual
and asked if he would like to be healed.**

**Jesus does not move among the other people
asking them if they want to be healed.
He focuses on this one man.**

**Jesus knew this man's situation without having to be told.
Thirty-eight years he had been paralyzed and unable to walk,
and perhaps all those years,
he had been brought here to the pool to wait
— ever hoping for a miracle.**

**Jesus then asks the man a very direct question:
“Do you want to be healed?”**

**If that question seems a bit silly;
the answer is even crazier.**

**Instead of saying: “Yes!” the man makes excuses:
“Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is
stirred up, and while I am going someone beats me to the steps
and makes it down into the pool before me.”**

At this point, the situation becomes very interesting

and has a direct application to our own lives.

BARRIERS TO BEING HEALED:

There are some barriers to becoming healed.

**50 years ago, or so, almost all of our health problems
resulted from diseases or injuries;
while today 80% of our maladies
are related to our lifestyle choices.**

We aren't feeling well, so we go to a doctor.

When the doctor tells us,

**"You need to decrease your calorie intake, drink less
alcohol, stop smoking, get more exercise, and stop
burning the candle at both ends - slow down, relax, and
take care of yourself"
- what do we do?**

We find a new doctor

who will simply write us a prescription for what ails us.

**Jesus DIDN'T ask the man, "Do you hate your illness?"
Of course, he hated his illness.**

Jesus asked the more important question:

"Do you want to get well?"

Before you can expect to change

you must decide if you want to be changed.

**Regardless of what you may want to change
it begins with a *desire* to change –
- the *will* to change.**

In the past 38 years this man had been a beggar;

living off the charity of others.

**If he were healed he would lose these donations.
He would lose the pity of others.**

**In other words,
this man – if healed - would have to take on
the responsibility for his life.**

**I know people who are on welfare –
- have been for years –
- who will not seek a job.**

**Because they make more on welfare
than they would by taking a job and paying taxes;
they have grown accustomed to not having to work.**

**In other words,
the healing process begins with the question:
“Are you willing to pay the price for wholeness?”**

**I believe this man is like many people in our day.
Their lives are an emotional wreck;
Their lives are dysfunctional,
but they have never considered
that God might have something new for them.**

**They simply don't know there is something more to life.
They have become satisfied with just getting by;
dragging their problems, dysfunctions along with them.**

**Perhaps they find their way into a church, seeking healing.
They hear the gospel; they even seem excited about it.**

But there comes a time when they realize

**they really do not want to put in the effort to be changed
so, they leave.**

**Before change can occur,
you and I must decide if we want to be changed.**

**A second barrier to being healed for the man
is that he was shackled by superstition;
locked into a single strategy for getting well.**

**For 38 years he has associated healing with bubbles.
He just couldn't see any other path to healing.**

**If we do want to be changed,
we must decide to stop making excuses.**

**The man's answer is an excuse and a complaint:
he doesn't say "Yes" as we would expect;
because all he sees are barriers:
no one to help him into the water quickly enough.**

In today's language we would say that he sees himself as a victim.

**When a person always sees themselves as a victim of society,
as a victim of their upbringing;
they convince themselves
that everything that happens to them
is somebody else's fault.**

**It has to be the wife's fault or the husband's fault
or their parent's fault or society's fault.
Anybody's fault but their own!**

**If we want to be changed
we must decide that we will stop making excuses.**

**We will take an honest look at our problems,
we will accept the responsibility for them.
Then . . . then . . . we are on the road to recovery.**

**Jesus said to the man at the pool:
“Get up. Pick up your mat and walk.”**

**Now, the man had to make a choice.
He could listen and just ignore the invitation,
or he could listen and wish something would happen
or he could listen and obey.**

**Three choices: ignore . . .
wish . . .
trust . . .**

**Trust and obey.
It’s a choice all of us have.
I have that choice. You have that choice.**

**Do you want Jesus to heal the parts of your life
where you’ve been hurt?
Or to take away the anger you have learned to love?
Or is it just easier to hold on to the hurt?**

**When Jesus says to “take up his mat”
He is telling the man - and all us – who truly want to change,
to trust Him!**

**If you truly want to change
then don’t leave any Plan B’s,
don’t leave any contingent provisions to go back.
Burn your bridges.
Cut off any possibility of going back.**

**Pick up you mat and walk away from your self-imposed limits.
Jesus said: 'Get up, take up your bed, and walk.'
And at once the man was healed,
and he took up his bed and walked."**

POST-HEALING:

**I wish I could say that there was a happy ending to this story.
Unfortunately, there was not.**

**The moment the man gets up and starts walking,
he clashes with the Pharisees.**

**For 38 years he hasn't had to worry about keeping the law,
but now he's walking along with his bed
and he gets accosted by the Jewish leaders.**

**Instead of celebrating his healing,
they said to the man who was cured,
"You can't work on the Sabbath!
It's illegal to carry that sleeping mat!"**

**Unfortunately, he is not without excuses,
for he says in effect:
"Hey, don't look at me. It's not my fault. The man who
made me well said, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' I'm just
doing as I was told."**

The Jews immediately demand, "Who is this fellow?"

**And the Pharisees will use this incident as further evidence
to get rid of this man, Jesus.**

CONCLUSION:

**At end of the day, wholeness wasn't to be found in this pool,
or any other pool,**

or in the legends or superstitions surrounding it.

Wholeness and healing is found in Christ and in Him alone.

**You know, there are many people in our world
who sit and wait, year after year,
waiting for something magical to happen in their lives.**

**They wait, year after year,
seeking healing and wholeness,
peace, and forgiveness,
and hope.**

**But the angel never appears,
and the water is never stirred up.**

**The false gods of our day always let people down.
Promises are made. But they're never kept.**

**The Scriptures say that, by nature,
all of us are powerless when it comes to spiritual things.**

**Our text this morning reminds us
change is possible,
that full provision has been made for our cure,
by means of a cross and an empty tomb.**

**Our Lord Jesus cured this man,
despite the fact that he didn't ask for the healing
and didn't know his Healer.**

**If there is a need in your life . . .
. . . maybe it's time to ask Jesus to heal that need.**

PRAYER:

Lord Christ, here you stand big as life next to us and our mats. You know right where we are. You found us in the crowd. You know that place of utter helplessness in each of our lives. Whether it is some habit or addiction, an inability to forgive or love, or a resentment deeply embedded in our past, You ask us to face ourselves with the words "Do you want to be healed?"

Help us to want to be healed. Help us to say "Yes, Lord, Yes!" At this very moment, some of us are praying, "I want to want to be healed; I'm willing to be willing. Lord, hear our prayers." Come in power and walk these aisles, touching our minds and hearts, until we hear your words "Rise - stand on your own two feet, Take up your mat - sever ties with the old life, And walk in a new day with your Savior."

We pray in the Precious Name of Jesus. AMEN