



Auburn Presbyterian Church

Passionately loving the Lord Jesus Christ and radiating that love to every individual

13025 Bell Air Drive, Auburn, CA 95603 (530) 823-3916 auburnpres@gmail.com

“Do you want to be healed?”

John 5:1-18

Each month when we gather, we take up another of the healing stories in God’s Word, and listen intently for what God would teach us that night about healing. If you’ve been with us for a while, you and I have learned a lot! Tonight, again, we pick up a healing incident, again from Jesus, but this one has a strange twist to which I think God wants to draw our attention.

Listen with me for God’s Word TO US TONIGHT, as I read from John’s gospel, chapter 5, verses 1-18. *[text]*

O boy, there is a lot here! This healing pool in Jerusalem was like Lourdes, in France, where since the Middle Ages, God has seemed to more likely grant miracles. And just like Lourdes, many people came there for healing. Some of the old manuscripts have a verse after verse 3, which says, “and they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease he had.” Modern translations are almost evenly split about whether to include this verse or not, but this “extra” verse does seem to explain a bit more why this poor man has been left out of healing, for we must assume he had come again and again to the pool, only to be edged out again and again by some other seeker. Once the “chance of the day” was gone, he would crawl off to beg on some corner, for that was the only way he could eat. What a terrible life! It’s like some pagan myth, say, of Tantalus, who was punished for his gross misbehavior by being made to stand in a pool of water beneath a fruit tree with low branches. Whenever he reached for the fruit, the branches raised his intended meal from his grasp. Whenever he bent down to get a drink, the water receded before he could get any. Over his head towered a threatening stone, like that of [Sisyphus](#). It is from this story that our word *tantalizing* comes.

How long can you come to a healing place, when you know someone else is going to get the one and only prize? If you were spending money on Lottery tickets, and you knew someone else would always win, you’d stop buying the tickets, right? What keeps the Lottery going is the misplaced faint hope that your numbers will hit that week. But hoping for a cash windfall is not the same as living with a crippling condition for 38 years. Would you give up, or would you keep coming to the pool, in hopes THIS day, you might make it into the water?

Now, in light of all this, what do you make of Jesus’ question to this poor man, “Do you want to get well?” Isn’t it insulting to ask such a thing of this cripple? Jesus must know where he is—at the pool where healing often happens. Wouldn’t it be obvious from location alone, that this man wanted healing? And then, if Jesus was looking at the fellow, he saw he was lying on a mat—another clue. Most likely, this man’s bones were malformed and his legs wasted, if it’s been 38 years since he’s walked. What could be more clear? OF COURSE this man wants to get well!

But perhaps Jesus' question is deeper than we suspect. Could there be some reasons why this man might possibly NOT want to get well? What would "getting well" mean for him?

"Getting well" would mean a major change in his life. Think of it. For a long time—perhaps nearly every day for 38 years—this man has had one item on his daily "do-list"—"get to the pool early". It's all he knows. His field of vision, his imagination, has shrunk to this one thing. If he is healed, then what will he do? He hasn't made decisions of his own, for years.

Did you know that men and women who are institutionalized for a long time—say, in prison—often have a very hard time adjusting to life "on the outside" for this very reason? In their institution, others made every decision for him. No puzzle about what outfit to wear—same day, same uniform. Choices in the food? Not likely. How about scheduling one's day? Already handled. When they complete their sentence, suddenly there's a rush of decisions to make, and these decisions are often difficult. For example, a sex offender is released. He has very little money. To conform to the law, he must live nearly a half-mile from any school or park, and register with his parole officer. Take out a map sometime, and see how hard it is to locate an area in a typical city that meets these standards, and then imagine what it costs to rent a room there. (I've not even mentioned he lures of former criminal friends or drug and alcohol habits or other handicaps.) No wonder the recidivism rate for all classes of adult convicts is something like 80%.

Our "pool man" might not want to get well because suddenly he'd have to make decisions he perhaps had never made as an adult. But there's another life-change that might make him hesitate to answer Jesus' question. As a healthy man, suddenly he would not be able to beg for donations anymore. His family will no longer support him, either. Crippled, people would usually have some sympathy for him, and would throw him a coin now and then. But who is going to support a healthy man, who ought to be out working? (Leave aside for the moment that this man probably has no marketable adult job skills.) Can he even imagine how he's going to make a living, if he cannot beg? Maybe he'd better stay "sick", or "disabled".

Now let's look at this man's relationships. "Getting well" for him would mean a major change in those relationships. We mentioned family, already. Perhaps they are burned-out caregivers, and if he's made well, they might take out their suppressed resentment by demanding he "make up for their support all these years". That would be an impossible demand, wouldn't you think? And what about getting a job—at 50 (I'm just guessing his age), with no marketable skills? "Excuse me, sir. I'm looking for work." "Yeah? What have you done so far?" What's our 'pool man' going to say? It might be embarrassing, or demeaning. Does he really want to face that?

You can see that our 'pool man' has probably settled into a life where he kinda knows his way. It ain't a great life, but he is getting by—for at least 38 years. "Getting well" would mean facing the stress of the unknown, confronting change that cannot be known in advance but will surely be challenging, without any guarantee of success. So, "Do you want to get well?" is a great question for him!

Notice the man's answer. "Do you want to get well?" is a 'yes' or 'no' question, isn't it? But the man doesn't answer the question; instead, he explains why he can't get well on his own—he has no one to put him in the water ahead of the rush. Maybe he's looking to Jesus for "a lift"?!

Jesus brushes aside excuses and explanations. He orders the man, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” No preparation—this must have been a total surprise to our ‘pool man’. He has this startled look on him. Then, without thinking, he moves a leg. He moves a leg, and it moves! He moves another leg. He flexes his ankles and feet and toes and knees and hips. He is breathing hard and fast, suddenly consumed by this unfolding intimate miracle. He hasn’t tried to rise in years, and he’s almost not sure how. Slowly, with shaking and uncertainty, like a mare’s colt newly born, he rises, and tests it out. “Am I really standing?” he wonders. He looks around—the world sure looks different from ‘up here’! He takes a step, turns a little. Summoning his courage, he stoops down to his mat, not sure he’ll ever get up. But he grasps his mat, and stands again! He hugs the mat, and walks slowly away from the pool, praising God for this miracle.

Meanwhile, Jesus has melted into the crowd.

Unfortunately, it’s the Sabbath, when work is forbidden. Carrying objects was a form of work, according to the rules, and some religious goody-goodies see this former cripple breaking the rules. This starts a whole new piece of the story, and I think I’ll leave that for when we look at John, chapter 9. Let’s focus tonight with Jesus’ question, “Do you want to be healed?”

Now, we all have wounds, crippling experiences, health problems, dis-abilities of one kind or another. Is there something we have been sitting on, like this crippled man, because there’s always a reason we cannot ‘get well’. Is there something we are holding on to, which is paying off for us so that we really want to stay “sick”, or “crippled”? Is there something in life we want to avoid, so our “sickness” is our ready-made excuse? Is there someone in your life you enable to remain crippled or sick, because you need to care for them too much?

“Do you want to be healed?” is no simple question, after all.

Well, do you? Do you want to be well, really well? Then, come to Jesus. Come for healing, which in Greek is the same word as salvation. Come for life. Come to Jesus, who is The Way, the Truth, and the Life.

[This sermon preached to the congregation of Auburn Presbyterian Church, Auburn, California on Friday, July 20, 2007 (Healing Service), by Rev. Kenneth B. Winter.]