

**Sunday, September 27, 2015 - Questions Jesus Asked: Do you want to be healed?
John 5:1-9 CEB
Marysville UMC
Pastor Jenny Smith**

Do you want to be healed? How does Jesus continue to always ask the most threatening **and** life-giving questions? I love this about Christ. Which means this must be how our God is as well. Able to look on each of us with eyes of both life-changing grace and “come on, let me change your heart, you can become more.”

Today we’re talking about a man wanting to be healed. I invite you to place yourself in this story today. How is Jesus asking you, “do you want to be healed?”

1 After this there was a Jewish festival, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. 2 In Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate in the north city wall is a pool with the Aramaic name Bethesda. It had five covered porches, 3 and a crowd of people who were sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed sat there.

Imagine the scene. Sounds like a crowded Emergency Room to me. The site is near the present Church of St. Anne, where the ancient pool has been discovered and excavated. It may have been a healing spa - where sick people sought comfort, but not healing. It’s called various things - Bethesda, Bethesda (which is actually a village at the NE end of Sea of Galilee), and Bethzatha (most scholars now accept the last one).

5 A certain man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him lying there, knowing that he had already been there a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

Where’s verse 4? Some manuscripts describe an angel periodically stirring up the pool, which likely added to the urgency of getting into the water. His answer to Jesus is curious and likely is the reason verse 4 was added.

38 years! What’s the significance to 38 years? It parallels the Israelite’s journey in the wilderness for 38 years.

Maybe you’ve been on a very long journey looking for healing. Maybe physical, spiritual or emotional healing. It feels like it’s never going to end. Jesus knows you’ve been waiting a long time. Where does Jesus come to meet you?

7 The sick man answered him, “Sir, I don’t have anyone who can put me in the water when it is stirred up. When I’m trying to get to it, someone else has gotten in ahead of me.” 8 Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” 9 Immediately the man was well, and he picked up his mat and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

Notice the man didn’t actually answer Jesus’ question. He feels the quick need to explain or share an excuse.

Jesus cuts the conversation short by giving the command that implies the healing. The sick man obeys. Same thing happened with the paralytic in Mark 2:9 with same result. The text following this one goes into a conflict about Jesus healing on the Sabbath. People are coming back to life,

right in front of everyone's eyes and of course people are worried about Jesus breaking the rules, yet again.

Application - What might God be saying to us through this story?

I can't get past Jesus' question: **Do you want to be healed?**

Becoming a whole person is terrifying. It means a couple things. I have to face the parts in myself that I hate. That I regret. That I avoid like the plague. Because facing them means I have to admit I don't have it all together. And maybe I need God. It requires I leave my nice, safe, comfortable way of life, as unhealthy as it may be. It's unknown and terrifying.

So no, I don't want to be healed, Jesus, if you're really asking.

Because it also means I not only have to face the unhealth in myself, it means I have to actually do something about it.

The one year old that I'm now chasing around our home is usually a pretty cute kid. He also did a number on my stomach muscles. Last spring, my midwife suggested I do special exercises so that my muscles would come back together. Turns out (especially during second and third pregnancies), your abdominal muscles separate and it takes some work to get them to come back together. No one told me about this beforehand!

She suggested some exercises at my 6 week follow up appointment. I heard her but didn't think much of it. I mentioned at a later appointment that they still felt separated. She mentioned the same exercises...again. I was a bit exasperated inside. I already knew about the exercises. But wondered why my muscles hadn't healed like they were supposed to.

Then about a week later, I was at the gym lifting weights. Don't be too impressed. They were 3 lb weights. My arms are surprisingly weak. Then it hit me.

If I wanted my muscles to heal, I had to actually do the exercises.

You roll your eyes at me now. But I seriously hadn't realized that I'd have to actually do the exercises to see a change. I thought knowledge and awareness were enough. My body would simply figure it out and get back to normal.

It's similar with our spiritual lives. There are attitudes, behaviors and prejudices that God invites us to focus on and some days, **I think awareness of that reality is enough.** But God gently waits for us to realize we have to actually put in some effort.

Do you want to be healed?

Jesus asks the sick man this question, he doesn't really answer but Jesus knows he does. Jesus doesn't sit around and listen to more excuses or long stories or passive-aggressive drama. Jesus doesn't pick the man up. Jesus gets right to the miracle. To the resurrection. To the path for wholeness.

"Get up. Pick up your mat. Walk."

What are the circumstances surrounding your places of pain and brokenness? That's your mat. You carry it with you, everywhere. It feels like a prison sometimes. No matter how hard we think we're trying, it never seems to change. We don't see the progress we hope for.

But when Jesus approaches us and we sense wholeness and resurrection are possible, he doesn't take away our mat. He comes to us on our mat, into our circumstances and tells us to pick it up and carry it with us. Our circumstances aren't in control anymore. God in us, is bigger than our circumstances.

Now Jesus doesn't change our circumstances. **He changes us.** He calls us into a new way of being, seeing, acting, speaking, thinking. And when we stand and rise to that new life, we discover we see our circumstances differently.

And this pool that the man is trying to get to. The healing waters he thinks will fix everything. It's an illusion. The pool tries to convince us that our life is nothing more than our circumstances. It deceives us into believing that life is to be found outside of ourselves. It tricks us into living an "as soon as" life. As soon as this or that happens everything will be better. I'll be happy. My problems will go away. I'll be satisfied (Michael K. Marsh).

But what I keep learning from this Jesus life, is that **the healing moment is always available.** It's not a sparkling pool that I'm trying to crawl towards. I can take a deep breath and see whatever is happening in a different light. I can choose love, forgiveness, grace, patience at every single moment. I often don't. But I have the opportunity to step into healing and wholeness. Because Jesus is standing next to me, while I whine and cry on my mat, gently offering me a new path forward. And he does the same thing for you.

Church, may we be people who own the simple fact that while resurrection sounds great, it's scary. And sometimes, we don't want Jesus to heal us. But when we're ready, may we be people of strength and courage who look right at our circumstances, at our paralyzing mats, and hear the voice of our Lord and Savior telling us to rise. To do whatever it takes to become whole and resurrected people. And that may mean counseling, hard conversations, seeing a doctor, actually doing what the doctor says, journaling, getting sober, stopping the thing you know you want to stop doing, prayer, confession. It's all part of how God heals us. May we become the children God is creating us to be. Amen.