



Do you want to be made well? The question Jesus asks the man who had been ill for 38 years can *easily* apply to us. Do we really want to be made well – if being made well means we have to change our lifestyle? If being made well means we have to deny ourselves something? If being made well means we have to leave hurts and resentments in the past?

How many of us, *myself included*, know we should eat less, exercise more – but we fail to do so because we really – really - deep down inside –like our life as it is, thank you very much.

We're not motivated enough to do what we know we "should" do to live a healthier life – physically, emotionally and spiritually. The routine- what we know- is so much easier. It's safe- even though it exacts a price.

C.S. Lewis in his book The Great Divorce challenges us to think about those things that we choose not to give up even when the choice would lead us to greater happiness and joy. He asks us to consider how we get trapped by our own infirmities –How we are unwilling to step out in faith.

We have grown so accustomed to our own infirmities – whether they are spiritual, mental or physical – that we don't see that we can be so much more when we answer the question with: "yes, I want to be made well."

Instead we cling to our life as it is rather than risk the unknown and rather than expend energy or time that we think we don't have.

And although this scripture is about physical wellness, it applies to psychological and emotional wellness, too.

And it applies to St. John's as a parish – do we **really** want to be made well? Are we willing to accept that we are where we are and stop focusing on how we got here? Are we willing to step out into a new future even though we don't quite know what that looks like? Are we willing to put some time and effort into discerning where God is calling us right now and into the future? Some, I'm sure- because I've heard it- remain pretty stuck in what got us to this place. Some, I'm sure, -because I've heard it- retain anxiety and resentment over what happened. My hope is that those who are in those places hear in the Gospel today Jesus saying to each of us, Do you want to be made well? My hope is that every single one of us will respond "yes, Lord." And then we have to stand, pick up our mat and walk.

One unusual aspect of this story is that **Jesus** initiates the healing. The man doesn't approach Jesus like the woman with bleeding Or the father of the young son. Or even Peter on behalf of his mother-in-law.

We don't know what it is about the man who had been there for 38 years- somehow I doubt he was wearing a sign that said "pick me." *Something* about that man touched Jesus – and out of all those who were at the pool – hoping to be the one who made it first into the waters that were stirred by the Holy Spirit – was this man.

Think of it – he had been ill for 38 years and spent a long time lying by this pool, hoping against hope that he would be the one – *just once* is all that was needed – to be first into the water. To be the one touched by the Holy Spirit.

Just like in Genesis, the Holy Spirit moved over the water and nothing was ever the same again. What a marvelous thing to hope for – no matter whether you were lame, or blind, or deaf – no matter what your illness, merely stepping into that pool when the Holy Spirit stirred the waters made you well.

After 38 years, though, it's easy to imagine that whoever might have been with this man in the beginning –waiting for that moment to pick him up and get him into the water- got tired and went home. "Good luck but I have to go home. I have my own family to care for. Good luck. Let us know how it turns out."

We'd *all* get worn out if time after time someone else got there first. Someone else got the promised healing. Someone else walked away whole. And we had to sit by the pool hoping for the next time – and the next- and the next.

Do you ever think that God isn't big enough –or doesn't care enough – or is too busy- to heal all of us? That whatever my problems are they're too small to merit God's attention? Maybe after 38 years this man thought that.

We do know, because he tells us, that he had no one to put him into the water. And so another got the healing.

Why was there only one healing? We don't know that either. But that was how this pool worked. One person, only one person, and whoever got there first – not whoever had been waiting the longest. Not whoever had the greatest need – whoever could move fast enough to get there first. Not fair – but that's how this pool worked. Jesus doesn't care about that. Jesus sees this man and asks him if he wants to be made well.

And Jesus heals him by words – no touch, no spitting into the mud to put the paste on the eyes, no picking up and putting into the pool, just simple words: Stand up, take your mat and walk.

And the man does – immediately. No waiting around. No process. Immediately.

Carol Mead, author of Holy Ordinary, writes: "A Cairo university has taken a new approach with incoming students. Instead of pushing them immediately into rote, structured learning, the university first encourages students to learn critical thinking skills. So some students have to "unlearn" their former ways of study before they can begin truly to learn. "A Christian living in today's culture also has to "unlearn" before fully seeking God. We have learned to tinker with our lives, to make small changes here and there, unwilling to sacrifice anything of our current lives.

"Yet God asks us not for minor change but for major transformation. If we "strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness," our lives can begin to order themselves around true, lasting priorities. "We have to stop thinking of God as only intent on polishing us up a bit and making us marginally better human beings. "The question is whether we are willing to spend some time unlearning, to be emptied of our expectations so we can be re-formed in God's image. So it comes down to this: do I truly want to learn to love as God asks me to love? Or am I so full of myself that there's no room for God's transformation?"¹

What if the man had said, "Well yes, I want to be made well but what's it going to cost? You know, my life isn't great but it's ok. I know what to expect. So maybe if I have to change a few things around, it's not going to be worth it. I won't know what to do or how to behave after 38 years lying by this pool. Umm, thanks, but no.

Jesus doesn't care about excuses. Jesus works past our fears. "Do you want to be made well?" he asks the man. Cut to the chase- what's really at issue here.

One of the questions Bishop will ask the Vestry is "What do you want to say about this congregation five years from now?" Will we be waiting by that pool for the chance- the mere chance- that we might get to the stirred up water first? Will we continue to blame our failures on not having someone to take us to the pool?

Or will we respond "Yes, Lord, I want to be well" and pick up our mat and walk? When our answer isn't an automatic yes, maybe we need to unlearn our former ways of thinking. Maybe we need to step out in faith that God, through Christ Jesus, walks with us, whenever and wherever we go.

We are where we are and it does not matter how or why we got here. We can move on from this place. We can move into a new way of being community - new ways being inclusive and new ways of worshipping together that glorify God. But we have to be willing to pick up our mat and walk.

God's transforming abilities require our willingness to let go of our past even in the face of an unknown future. We have such possibilities before us to be community, to be inclusive and to

¹ Carol Mead. May 6, 2010. <https://mail.google.com/mail/?hl=en&shva=1#inbox/1286d93f1a57641c>

worship together. We have such talents and skills and resources to create a new way of being St. John's in Crawfordsville. Yes, it takes courage. Yes, it takes letting go of hurts and resentments. Yes, it takes a willingness to dream and to plan and to act.

With God, nothing is impossible if we will trust and love and work to make the realm of God a reality on this earth. "Get up" Jesus says to us, "pick up your mat and walk." Will you walk with me? *Amen.*