

May 1, 2005

Patchogue Church of the Nazarene

"Would You Like To Get Well?"

John 5:1-9a NLT

Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. 2 Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. 3 Crowds of sick people--blind, lame, or paralyzed--lay on the porches. 5 One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. 6 When Jesus saw him and knew how long he had been ill, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

7 "I can't, sir," the sick man said, "for I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to get there, someone else always gets in ahead of me."

8 Jesus told him, "Stand up, pick up your sleeping mat, and walk!"

9 Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up the mat and began walking!

Notice that it was a Jewish holy day, a holiday, a time for feast and festival and Jesus came to Jerusalem for this holy day. Now, I don't know what you do when you have a holiday, I usually spend time with family and look forward to a relaxing day. Jesus uses this holiday to find opportunities for doing good to the crowds of needy people in the city. The rest of the city is having a good time, there is celebrations in every house. The holy day is a time for eating and drinking and rejoicing. But where does Jesus keep the feast? How does he spend his holiday? He walks among the poor and the sick. That's the love of Jesus. He goes to the pool of Bethesda. Bethesda means a house of grace or house of mercy. The pool was in the northeastern part of Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate. Archaeologists have discovered two pools in this vicinity, one 55 feet and another 65 feet. The shorter pool had five arches over it with a porch beneath each arch, corresponding to the description given in John 5:2.

Crowds of the city's sick came there to the "house of mercy". The pool every now and then was stirred by perhaps an underground spring, or as the people of that time believed, by an angel. Perhaps there was an occasional cure, or perhaps there was a rumor of a cure and so around it some charitable persons had built five porches. Large numbers of sick, blind, lame, or paralyzed folks were lying, each one on his own mat, waiting for the moving of the waters. They were there while others were feasting, suffering with pain while others were rejoicing, sighing while others were singing. Here is where Jesus came. Let us learn this lesson, we should be thankful for all we have, there is nothing wrong with joyful celebrations, but we should also remember the hurting, the needy, the sick and discover the higher joy of doing good to others. Let us not neglect to help the poor, sick and needy in our city.

Jesus not only goes into this area where there are so many in need, but He finds the most needy among them, at least I would hope there was no one worse than this man. Jesus

singles out a man who has been sick for 38 years. It is bad enough to be sick a year, but 38 years! That's more than half a lifetime. Not only that but he had no friends to help him in the pool when the waters were stirred up. There had to be something wrong with this man's personality. He was at this pool for 38 years and in 38 years he was not able to make one friend. This man had more than a physical problem.

Well, after all these years of misery, on a day that, although a holiday, I'm sure, he just expected to be like any other day, little did he know this day would not be like all the others. Jesus gets the man's attention. And He asked him this question, "Would you like to get well?"

What? Jesus, with all due respect, you must kidding. This man has been here for 38 years trying to take advantage of something that he believes will heal him. If nothing else at least he has shown some determination and persistence, and You ask him, "Would you like to get well?" Jesus, what are You thinking? No offense, but isn't that kind of a silly question? Or is it? Could it be that rather than a silly question is was in fact the toughest question this man ever had to answer in his life. Why would it be a tough question? Well, perhaps this man, like so many of us, had become so secure not only in his disability but in the way he thought healing would come, that he really wasn't open to any other option at all. In fact, I think that's what we see in the conversation between Jesus and this man. Notice what happens here. Jesus asks him, "Would you like to get well?" To which we would expect the man to say something like, "Yes, of course I want to be well." But that's not what the man says, does he? No, instead he replies, (v7) "I can't, sir, for I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred up. While I am trying to get there, someone else always gets in ahead of me."

Do you see? His whole focus is on the pool. Who is he eye to eye with? Jesus! Yet his focus is on the pool. He apparently doesn't even consider the possibility that before him stands the Source of all healing because over the years of pain and disappointment he has become convinced that the only possible way to be healed is in the water of the pool of Bethesda.

John Calvin said it this way, "This sick man does what we nearly all do. He limits God's help to his own ideas and does not dare promise himself more than he can conceive in his own mind."

Jesus, seeing that the man's will to be well had been so damaged and clouded says to him in effect, "Forget the pool. Move beyond your narrow belief about how you can be healed. Lay aside your trust in this pool. I say to you... *I say to you* Get up! Pick up your mat and start walking." Little did the man realize just how tough Jesus' question would be. Did he really want to be well? Enough to consider new options? Enough to abandon his own narrow notions? Enough to trust God with his life?

That's kind of scary stuff after 38 years of counting on the same thing. But John records it, simply yet powerfully, "He rolled up the mat and began walking!" Do you see what

Jesus did? In asking the question, "Would you like to get well?" He forced this man to come face-to-face with what he was really trusting for his wholeness.

Somehow this morning we need to hear Jesus ask us that same tough question. Every one of us probably needs to experience a healing of some sort. For some of us it may be physical, but for most it's probably emotional and spiritual. We are aware of issues in our lives that we want to be freed from. We want to experience healing, and we ask God over and over again to heal us.

"Just take away the pain." Somehow wipe away the memory. Remove the scars. And so often we get fixed in our minds just how we want God to accomplish the healing. It all seems so easy to us and makes so much sense. We focus on the healing waters of the pool, but that's all we see. But because Jesus loves us so much and is committed to our wholeness, He continues to confront us with the tough questions. He refuses to be a fairy godmother type waving a magic wand to painlessly cure all of our ills. He wants us to deal with the deeper issues in our lives. Like where our trust really lies. What our security is really based on. Whether or not we're willing to allow Him to use our pain to bring glory to God and blessing to this world. And so He asks us the hard question, "Would you like to get well?" Do you want to move beyond a Band-Aid solution to a deep problem? Are you willing to deal with the reason for your pain?"

What is the issue of healing you are facing right now? Maybe it's physical. But far more likely it's the healing of a memory or the healing of a relationship or the healing of damaged emotions or the healing of guilt and shame. Maybe you've just been asking God to quietly and painlessly heal it. And sometimes God does it that way. But could it be that Jesus is wanting to help you deal with a tough question? Is there an issue that you need to honestly admit to yourself and to God and maybe even to someone else? Are you willing to accept that God's method of healing that issue might be different from what you've envisioned?

Or maybe you've given up hope that your problem can really ever be helped. I don't know what you are facing. Maybe it's a marriage that is crumbling or a family falling apart. Maybe it's a habit that you just can't shake. Maybe there are financial problems. You've tried and tried to fix it, and nothing works. And so you've come to the place where you've just said, "Oh, what's the use?" It's really not so much that you don't want help but that you've begun to doubt that help is really possible.

If that's where you find yourself this morning, then I challenge you to look up from the murky waters of the pool and into the eyes of the One who truly has the power to heal and hear Him ask you the question, "Would you like to get well?" Are you willing to trust your healing to Jesus? It might mean you would have to deal with some things that you really haven't wanted to face. But if you will trust your healing to Jesus, He will bring you to wholeness -in His time and in His way. Perhaps the real question is, "Are you willing to trust His way?"