

March 18, 2007 – 4th Sunday of Lent

“The Wholeness Question: Would you like to get well?”

John 5:1-15 NLT

[Click here for the notes in the bulletin.](#)

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! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath day. 10 So the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, "You can't work on the Sabbath! It's illegal to carry that sleeping mat!"

11 He replied, "The man who healed me said to me, 'Pick up your sleeping mat and walk.' "

12 "Who said such a thing as that?" they demanded.

13 The man didn't know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. 14 But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, "Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you." 15 Then the man went to find the Jewish leaders and told them it was Jesus who had healed him.

In Alpha we have a saying, “there is no such thing as a dumb question.” You’ve heard that expression before. It is meant to encourage people to ask what’s on their mind, and to communicate to them that every and any question will be respected. But, do we really mean, there is no such thing as a dumb question?

Have you ever been asked a dumb question? Have you ever been asked a dumb question by someone who is not suppose to be dumb?

(Without meaning to offend any lawyers) Here are some actual exchanges between lawyers and witnesses in the court room. (I hasten to say that Atty. Robert Dapelo has never asked a dumb question in court, but some lawyers have).

"Now doctor, isn't it true that when a person dies in his sleep, he doesn't know about it until the next morning?"

"The youngest son, the twenty-year old, how old is he?"

"Were you present when your picture was taken?"

"Was it you or your younger brother who was killed in the war?"

"How far apart were the vehicles at the time of the collision?"

"You were there until the time you left, is that true?"

Q: "She had three children, right?"

A: "Yes."

Q: "How many were boys?"

A: "None."

Q: "Were there any girls?"

Q: "You say the stairs went down to the basement?"

A: "Yes."

Q: "And these stairs, did they go up also?"

Q: "All your responses must be oral, OK? What school did you go to?"

A: "Oral."

In the Scripture reading today Jesus asks what appears to be a dumb or silly question...but is it?

Jesus goes to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. There were three holy days when Jewish men were required to come to Jerusalem: (1) Passover, (2) The Feast of Pentecost, and (3) The Feast of Tabernacles. We are not told which feast it was, but Jesus is there in Jerusalem for one of these feasts. On the Sabbath Jesus went near the Sheep Gate, where they brought sheep into the city, bathed them in the pools that were near that gate, before taking them to the Temple to be sacrificed. One of these pools was called the pool of Bethesda, which means *House of Kindness*.

Archaeologists have discovered two pools in that area one having five arches over it with a porch beneath each arch, just as described in this Scripture. Crowds of the city's sick would come here. Every now and then the pool would be stirred by probably by underground springs, but the people believed they were stirred by an angel. Perhaps there was an occasional cure or a rumor of a cure and so crowds would come and someone built arch covered porches to protect the people from the elements of the weather. Large number of sick, blind, lame people lying each on their own mat would come waiting for the moving of the waters.

Reminds me of a place like Lourdes, in France where many make pilgrimage seeking a cure in the water there. (I saw a joke the other day. A woman is applying for a job at a travel agency. She asks the owner what kind of Medical coverage they offer. He says to her, "for our medical coverage we offer one free round trip to Lourdes.").

Jesus comes to this pool of Bethesda and finds a man lying there who had been sick for thirty-eight years (that's more than half a life time). When Jesus saw him and knew how long he had been ill, he asked him, "Would you like to get well?"

Doesn't that seem like a dumb question? Why else would he be there? He has been sick for thirty-eight years. With all due respect to Jesus, wasn't that a silly question?

You know what else I find odd? The man says he has no one to help him into the pool. Are you kidding me? He has been coming to this pool for thirty-eight years and he has no one, no friends who can help him into the pool when the water is stirred up? He has not been able to make one friend in thirty-eight years? How about family? Where are they? He is not close to any family members either? Seems to me he had more than physical problems, he had some personal problems. He certainly not good at developing relationships. And Jesus asks a man like this, "Would you like to get well?"

What a silly question...or is it? Or...is it, in fact, a tough question...the toughest question this man would ever have to answer in his life. Why would it be a tough question? Perhaps this man, like so many of us, had become so secure in his disability and the way he thought healing would come, that he really wasn't open to any other option at all. Have you accepted your circumstances and either have given up hope that there is anyway out or you are so sure there is only one way out that you are not open to any other option? Would you like to get well?

Notice the conversation between Jesus and this man:

Jesus asks, "Would you like to get well?" We would expect the man to say something like, "Yes, of course I want to be well." But that is not what he says, is it? No, instead he says (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."

First of all he is making excuses. That's what we do when it is just too hard to change...to change ourselves or to change our circumstances. We make excuses. That's what we do when we like feeling sorry for ourselves and want others to feel sorry for us too. We make excuses. That's what we do when we want an easy way out of our problems, we make excuses so we don't have to do what we should do. We give ourselves an excuse to handle our problems in a way that we know is not healthy.

What else do we see in the statement of the sick man at the pool? What is he focused on? His focus is on the pool. To him that is the only answer to his problem. And while he is so focused on the pool, who is he eye to eye with? Who is right in front of him? Standing before him is the Source of all healing. Jesus! Right in front of his face is the

answer to all his problems. Does he even consider the possibility of Jesus who now stands eye to eye with him? No, he is still focused on the pool. Why? 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. Sometimes we limit God's help to our own ideas and we only trust in what we can conceive in our own mind.

Jesus seeing that the man's will to be well has been so damaged and clouded says to him in effect, "Forget the pool. Move beyond your narrow belief about how you can be healed. Your way is not going to work, stop trusting in this pool. Are you open to something new? For I SAY TO YOU get up! Pick up your mat and start walking."

Little did the man at the pool realize 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 scary stuff after 38 years of counting on the same things. But John records the man's decision simply yet powerfully, "He rolled up the mat and began walking!"

Did you see what Jesus did? In asking what seemed to be a silly question he forced the man to do a tough thing...come face-to-face with what he really was trusting in for his wholeness.

Somehow this morning you need to hear Jesus asks you the same tough question. The wholeness question: "Do you want to get well? Do you want to be whole?" Everyone of us needs to experience a healing of some sort. What issue of healing are you facing right now? Maybe it's physical, but more likely it's the healing of a memory or of a relationship, or of damaged emotions or a healing of guilt. Maybe you have a marriage that is crumbling, or a family that is falling apart. Maybe you have a habit that you can't shake. Maybe you have financial problems. Maybe you have been trying to fix it, and nothing works. Maybe you have come to a place where you've just said, "oh, what's the use?"

If that is where you find yourself this morning, then I challenge you to look up from the murky waters of the pool and look into the eyes of the One that has been right in front of you. 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 Jesus? It might mean you will 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?"

Have you ever trusted Jesus? I mean really trusted Him. Have you ever given the control of your life completely into His hands?

Later in this story we find that the Jewish leaders objected saying to the man, "You can't work on the Sabbath! It's illegal to carry that sleeping mat!" The Bible did not teach that it was a sin to carry that sleeping mat on the Sabbath, it was a man-made law. It was one of the many rules the religious leaders made to the extreme of what the Bible taught.

The man replied, "The man who healed me said to me, 'Pick up your sleeping mat and walk.' " He calls him the man (well, Jesus is "The Man!") he didn't know who Jesus was.

Afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, "Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you." I believe Jesus was saying, "You know what would be worse than being sick for 38 years? It would be far worse to continue living in sin." If you don't turn from your old way of life and trust Jesus to forgive you, not only will you not be whole in this life, something worse may happen to you including the worse of all, eternal separation from God. Well, this man put his faith in Jesus for v15 says, "Then the man went to find the Jewish leaders and told them it was Jesus who had healed him."

Today, answer the wholeness question, say yes to Jesus.