

Do You Want to be Made Well?

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool,
called in Hebrew Beth-zatha...

Beth-zatha; that's in Aramaic, the language Jesus spoke. We're probably more familiar with the word *Bethesda*, right? The pool of Bethesda? Same thing. It means "house of mercy." Bethesda was this huge rectangular pool, with five porticoes around it. Five covered porches (one on each side, and one dividing it down the middle). And in these, St. John tells us,

lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.

Why? Why'd they all go there? What was so special about Bethesda?

Well, if you take a look again at the gospel printed in the bulletin, you'll see, there's a verse 3, and a verse 5. But no verse 4. It's in some bibles, but not our New Revised Standard Version.

Verse 4 was omitted, because it was not in the original text. It had been added to the original—really early on—to explain why the sick came to Bethesda.

Here's Verse 4:

There lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed—
waiting for the stirring of the water; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain
seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever stepped in first after the
stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had.

Well, that's pretty cool. Was it all true? I don't know. Some archeologists believe that the pool was fed by a nearby underground spring. And the spring intermittently ran water into the pool, causing it to stir up. But was it a place of miracles? (I mean, other than a self-feeding pool in the middle of the desert). Did healings really happen there? Maybe. People certainly *thought* so. They thought *something* there could change their lives. So hundreds came. And waited.

One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him,
"Do you want to be made well?"

I don't know. Sometimes it seems like Jesus asks some *really silly* questions.

"Do you want to be made well?"

Uh... ya' think? Whadd'ya mean, do I want to?... Of course I do... Why the heck else would I keep coming here? For 38 years?

At least, that's how I expected the guy to answer. But he doesn't, does he? He doesn't give the obvious answer. So, maybe there's something else going here.

The sick man answered,

"Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me."

He deflects... gives an excuse. He explains... He complains... He does everything *but* answer the question. 'Do you *want* to be made well?' Maybe it's not such a silly question.

This story in John's gospel is often called:

'Jesus heals the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda'.

Funny thing is, nowhere in the text does it say the man was paralyzed. The Greek says he suffered *astheneia*; that he was 'not strong', that he was 'without vigor.' That's all it says.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

Made well. The Greek word there is *hygeis*. Which *can* mean physical health. But it's got a much deeper meaning too. A spiritual meaning. *Hygeis* means having sound thinking. It implies a sense of being well, of being at peace and right with the world. It means being spiritually whole.

"Do you *want* to be made well?"

Sir, I uh... I have...uh...no one to put me into the pool... and uh... someone else, you know, someone else gets there first...

The sick man doesn't seem so very eager for a cure.

This story isn't really about mending a frail body. If it was, the man would have jumped at the chance.

This story is about healing a broken spirit--It's about freeing a paralyzed will.

Do you *want* to be made well? Do you *really want* things to be different? Do *you* want to be different?

Why does the sick man hesitate?

Well, 38 years is a long time. Maybe his whole lifetime. Maybe his whole identity is defined by that illness. (He doesn't even have a name in the story. He's just 'the sick man'). That's how the world sees him. That's how he sees himself. It's who he is, how he lives, and what he does. Every day. Day after day. Year after year.

So, what would it mean to suddenly not be the sick man anymore?

It's kind of scary for him. *Who am I? Who will I become? Where will I go? What will I do now?*

Do you want to be made well?

That question gets scary, when the one asking *actually has the power to do it*.

Then, it's this huge question, with a world of possibility on the other side of it. Change can be scary.

Even change for the better. Sometimes it just seems easier, just safer, to avoid the question.

Many of *us* suffer *astheneia*. A lack of vigor... a lack of peace and wholeness of spirit. So many of us have *something* in us that draws us to the pool of healing. Something that keeps us from living fully. Some sickness of spirit, some trouble of mind that brings us here to the 'house of mercy.' Something that leads us—looking for hope—to the word of God. And so many of us just wait...And wait... for something to change in us. Day after day, week after week, year after year. Until we get used to the waiting. Doing what we can, with what we've got. Getting used to getting by, best we can. Day after day, week after week, and year after year. We get passive. Grumbling and making excuses. We adapt to the waiting. Filling the emptiness in us with a thousand, thousand, things. With busy-ness and schedules and commitments. With chemicals and food. Obsessions and addictions. With computers and TV and toys. Anything, anything to distract us from the emptiness and ache. Anything to numb the pain of being who we are. Until we're sleepwalking through our lives. Letting ourselves believe *this is as good as it gets*. Until the 'just waiting' feels safe, and familiar. Until waiting around is who we are, how we live, and what we do. Until our routines take hold of us, and *this is how we do it... this is how we've always*

done it. Until the drowsy deadness settles in. And we just keep coming to the pool. But not really expecting anything. Not wanting things to be different. Afraid to become different. **Until the offer of new life just sounds like inconvenient change.**

Jesus said to the man, ‘Stand up, take up your mat, and walk.’

Stand up... The Greek word is *egeire*. The literal translation of that word is not ‘stand up.’ It’s ‘wake up’... ‘rouse yourself from sleep.’ And all over the bible, that word is used to describe *resurrection from the dead*.

Egeire, Jesus says. *Wake up! Rouse yourself! Shake off the complacency. Wake up! This is not who God made you to be! It does **not** have to be like this. Wholeness, health, joy, strength and peace... New life... it’s all here... waiting for you. Wake up!*

Do you *want* to be made well?

Do we? Do we *want* to jump into a place where the angel of the Lord—where the Holy Spirit of God—is stirring things up? Do we want to jump into a great big pool of possibility? Where our lives could *totally change*? It’s pretty scary. Because if we say yes, then we’ve got to get honest. And start looking deep inside. And see all those ways we’ve become complacent. See the sickness that’s settled in. All the unhealthy stuff we cling to, to get us through the day. The grudges and grumbling. The excuses. The long-held prejudices and suspicions. The need to be victims. The need to control everything... (Whatever our personal brand of spiritual sickness is).

Letting go of our old default thinking is tough. And it takes trust. It means trusting that God will step right into the middle of all the junk—all our spiritual debris—and really heal us. It means trusting that God loves us in spite of our sickness.

Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’

At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

God *does* love us, in spite of our sickness. God has the power to transform us. To change, and to heal us. To fill our hearts with of the peace of the Spirit. And our days with light of Christ.

Stand up, take your mat and walk.’

God is faithful. God will free us and give us new life in Christ. New life today, new life always.

The question is... Do you want to be made well?

Amen.