

Reflections by the Pool of Bethesda

Maple Grove UMC

September 26, 2021

Rev. Patricia Wagner

Mark 5: 1-9

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2 Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew[[a](#)] Bethesda,[[b](#)] which has five porticoes. **3** In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.[[c](#)] **5** One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. **6** 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?” **7** The sick man answered him, “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.” **8** Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” **9** At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath.

It has been not quite 33 days that I've been

Sitting by the pool of Bethesda described in our story,

Longing for the waters of healing,

So close and so far.

Although in some ways, I've realized, I've been

waiting for the spirit to stir the waters,

and to climb in and finally be fully, utterly healed

For as long as I can remember.

This is my sixth joint reconstruction:

my right knee, in college,

My right ankle crushed and fixed
in my 30's, then decades later replaced
then my thumb joints
And now this knee,
Not to mention heartbreaks and other times of rebuilding,
Which you've known, too.

Each time, I've wondered
As have you,
As every human being on earth
Most of whom have suffered far more than I, has wondered:
Will I know healing? Will I ever be made fully well?
It always feels like an open question.
It does now.

Like this man in our story:
38 years, which would be most of lifetime in those days,
Lying on that portico,
together with what John describes as a multitude
Lame, blind, paralyzed.
ἀσθενούντων (asthenountōn in Greek,
Translated in Latin and our translation today as
in-validus, invalid,
Not strong, feeble, weakened

A harsh word,
But descriptive of how they've felt
 how we feel, how I feel when I cannot stand

Jesus comes to Jerusalem for a festival
And chooses to go to this place, among the weak,
 And asks a man,
 perhaps the one who looked like
 he had been there the longest:
 Do you want to be made well?

It is such a strange question, cruel even.
 Does he not know the answer already?
 Why else was the man there?

The man's reply reveals so much;

How can I be healed, when I have no one to help me get into the water? Someone else always goes in ahead of me and receives the healing.

He does not hide the suffering that comes
of seeing others healed,
 lives made whole
 while our own or those we love;
 Are not healed
 not transformed into the body and life

we want and need.

He also does not hide his loneliness:

there is such a sense of isolation
in suffering. I've felt that.

But he has no one to help him.

And his healing is dependent upon having someone
who will carry him to the waters.

All the healing that I have known in my life

Physical, mental, spiritual,

Has come because others have helped me.

Paid attention to my wounds

Gotten me to treatment.

A week ago, my leg failed and then I got it wedged

In the door jam,

With just a few phone calls, a neighbor brought crutches

Two friends lifted me up on either side,

Got me slowly to bed.

You have prayed for me,

Brought me to physical therapy

And other treatments

Healers who are coaxing my limb into moving again.

I would not have gotten there without you.

And I am making progress because of you.

But I still feel that yearning

For those healing waters of our story.

They still feel so close, and yet so far,

That which will make me well.

I think about my father, who lived his life

As, what John might call, an invalid.

Paralyzed.

He was infected with the polio virus

In a swimming pool when he was 14 years old.

And over the decades, there were many interventions,

A particularly physical therapist

who got him up and moving again,

But also preachers at religious gatherings

Who promised to make him walk,

And were so disappointed, as were the congregations,

when he didn't come through for them.

But over the years,

Dad was healed, he told me.

Not of the paralysis,

That would would curtail and shorten his life,

But within.

He felt whole,

At-one with his life, within its limitations.

Every life, every single life,

Is lived, to some extent, on that portico,

With weakness and vulnerability

Which only we fully know.

And so, we listen to Jesus' question again:

Do you want to be made well?

And realize, as we always must with stories in

John's gospel, that the question is bigger than

we thought, more universal.

Do we want to be made well

The Christ, the bearer of God's loving energy

asks the people of the world,

Do we, as global community

As a country?

And I wonder, with all that divides us as a nation,

Do we really want to be a place where

We don't leave people to suffer alone,

But we naturally, and by our policies,

help everyone get

to the waters that will heal them,

And then,

Do we want to be made well,

healed within, as my father was healed?

Then we are to listen,

for the power of love, made known in Jesus

is here, right now, with us on the portico.

He invites us to stand, as he invites the man to stand,

To rise above the life

to which thought he was condemned.

To claim the life he'd been given

Take up your mat

Pick up your life,

And walk, he says.

Our story today says,

that with the support and companionship of the community,
we can enter the waters that heal us.

By the love that God gives us as persons

And as a church,

help others move toward those waters,

And by life that persists in us,

The holy, precious life that God gives us

and calls forth from us,

in whatever situation we find ourselves

We can rise

We can pick up our lives,

and walk.

May it be so for me,

may it be so for you.

Amen.