



North Shore  
**Congregational  
Church**  
FOX POINT, WI

*From the Pulpit...*

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## ***“Do You Want to Be Healed?”***

**Rev. Dr. Martin Hall – Preaching**

*John 5: 1-9a; Romans 6: 1-14*

*October 6, 2019*

“Do you want to get well?” It was about 5 years ago that I was first taken aback by that question. It’s a fascinating inquiry that Jesus brings to that lame man camped out beside the pool. It was a healing passage I’d encountered many times, over many years, but my focus had always been on the healing. It wasn’t until five years ago, or so, that my attention was turned to the question that preceded it!

Try, if you will, to picture the scene of this encounter...

This story takes place at the edge of Jerusalem, near the pool that our translation names as Beth-zatha. (Other translations use Bethesda and, frankly, that’s easier to say, so I’m going with that for today.) Anyway, the edges of the Bethesda pool were lined with individuals suffering from every form of infirmity – disease, illness, injury, disability – they all surrounded these pools and waited, vigilantly, for the waters to move. You see, now and then, something would cause the waters to stir. It was the belief of many of the Jews of this time that when this happened – when the waters started to agitate in some way – that it was the work of a healing angel of God that was enlivening the water. It was their belief, then, that the first person (and only the first person) to jump in the water, would be healed. So, what we have, here, is something of a gathering place of those who were ill and diseased, injured and lame, all camping at the edge of these waters, hoping to be the first to jump in upon the stirring to be healed.

The particular man with whom Jesus speaks, however, was sick in some way that made him immobile. So, while he camped at the edge of these waters, dreaming of the healing that could come if only he could be the first in, the truth is that he had no chance. He couldn’t get himself into the water, and by the time he could actually find someone to put him in, someone else would have already beaten him to it. So, after 38 years of his infirmity, this man continued to simply camp at the edge of these waters and dream of a healing he knows, in his heart, he’ll never receive.

Enter Jesus with his seemingly absurd question. If you really think about it, it’s almost ridiculous that Jesus would ask the question that he asks. To a man who’s been ill for 38 years – to a man who’s camping, day after day, at the edge of the Bethesda pool – to a man who’s

watched as others have beaten him to the dream he, himself, so desperately longed for – to a man who has no hope but to spend his life sitting right at the brink of the healing he desires – Jesus asks, “Do you want to get well?” Really? That’s the big question? It’s like asking a five year-old whether or not they want a piece of candy!

That’s the image I get from this man in his response to Jesus. Sitting by that pool, longing for that miracle he simply cannot attain, I imagine him looking towards Jesus flabbergasted at the absurdity of the question, and saying, ‘Of course I want to be healed. Of course I want to be made well. Why else would I be sitting here? Do you think I enjoy this? Of course I want it. I just can’t get in the pool to make it happen.’ Now, we know what happens at that point. We watch as Jesus heals him and the story continues from there. But, it’s that question that I find utterly fascinating. How could Jesus actually ask this lame man, sitting at the edge of those healing waters, if he wants to get well? What’s the point of asking that question? Of course he’d want to be made well. He’s been ill for 38 years, he’s done nothing but camp beside this pool day after day and his life is little but dreaming of living the healed life that has forever remained just beyond his reach. How could Jesus ask that man if he wants to be healed?

Well, let me come at it a different way. He’s been ill for 38 years. He’s known no life but the life of sitting around that pool day after day. He’s dreamed of living a healed life, but he’s immersed in living the only life he’d ever known. So, think about it – consider the implications – healing his body goes so much further that giving him the ability to walk. Healing his body changes his life – it changes everything.

- If this man is healed, there’s no reason to camp by the pool for even a single day more.
- If this man is healed, the state of being he’s known for 38 years disappears.
- If this man is healed, he can pursue the dream he’s constructed in his mind, but the only life he’s ever known becomes an immediate memory.
- If this man is healed, he can’t camp by the pool, dream of unattainable glories, and live off the charity of others for another day.
- If this man is healed, his life changes in every way, the life he’s known ceases to exist, and all he has been and all he has done has to be re-invented in light of the healing that he has received.

It seems, on the surface, to be such an absurd question. ‘Do I want to get well?’ ‘Of course I want to get well, why do you think I’m sitting here.’ But, if you think about it, it goes so much deeper than that. ‘Do you want everything that comes along with getting well? Do you want the responsibility, the challenge, the newness, the unknowns? Do you want to redefine your life in light of the healing you have received? Are you ready for everything that comes along with that healing?’

“Count yourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus.” Says Paul. In just a few minutes, we’re going to gather at the table to remember and embrace the gift of grace, love and mercy that Jesus declared at the Last Supper and carried forth onto the cross. It is a moment in which we remember the true heights and breadths of the healing that Jesus brings into our lives today, and into our life eternal. But, as we come to that table, I would suggest that those words from Paul are a reminder – a reminder that it is proper for us to do a little reflection, now and then, on the question Jesus asks of that man at the Bethesda pool. In this table is the symbol of

all of the healing that Jesus brings into our lives. The question remains for us, however...Are we ready for everything that comes with that? Are we open to the responsibility, the challenge, the newness, the unknowns? Are we willing to redefine our lives in light of the healing we have received? Are we willing to carry the cross that our healing entails?

The grace of the table is ours to embrace. The question that lies beneath it, however, is that which Jesus asked that man beside the pool. 'Do we really want to be made well?'