

Questions Jesus Asked sermon series

“Do You Want to Get Well?”

[John 5:1-9a](#)

This Lenten season, we are reflecting on some of the questions Jesus asked throughout his ministry. So far, we have considered three of them: “What are you looking for?”, “What is your name?” and “Do you see this woman?” This morning, we turn to the 4th question: “Do you want to get well?”

We know the healing process begins with the questions doctors ask to their patients. When you are sick and go see a doctor, he/she would never touch any part of your body before asking you a series of questions: “What can I do for you?” “Are you in any pain?” “Can you tell me how bad it is?” “From one to ten, where is your pain?” “What other symptoms do you have?” How long have you had them? “Is this the first time you are experiencing this?” “When was your last period?” “Are you taking any medication?” “Are you allergic to any medication?” These simple and routine questions are necessary and even essential for a doctor to ask in order to give a correct diagnosis and embark on the right treatment of our illnesses.

Like doctors of our time, Jesus, the great physician, who performed numerous miracles of healing in his ministry also asked questions to some of the people whom he healed: He asked, “Who touched me?” when a woman who had been bleeding for 12 years (Mark 5:30; Luke 8:45) touched his clothes; “What is your name?” to a man who was suffering from mental illness (Mark 5:9; Luke 8:30); “How long has this been going on?” when a father brought to Jesus his son who was convulsed with a seizure (Mark 9:21); “What do you want me to do for you?” when Bartimaeus, a blind beggar, called out Jesus’ name (Matthew 20:32; Mark 10:51; Luke 18:41). “Do you see anything?” after Jesus applied his own saliva to the eyes of a blind man and put his hands on him (Mark 8:23); and the question we hear today, “Do you want to get well?” which Jesus asked to the man in today’s scripture reading from the Gospel of John, chapter 5, verses 1 through 9.

“Do you want to get well?” On the surface, this seems like a straightforward question, similar to the ones Jesus asked different individuals in the process of their healing. But, when you consider the circumstances of the man whom Jesus healed, you soon realize that it was not simply a question to solicit mere information but a question of remarkable depth.

Let’s now dig into the context to better understand Jesus’ question, “Do you want to get well?” While he was in Jerusalem in observance of a Jewish festival, Jesus went to the Bethesda pool. It was nearby the Sheep Gate, one of several gates of the city of Jerusalem. In Jesus’ time, the Bethesda pool was surrounded by five decorated colonnades that were like interior covered porches. This pool, whose name meant “house of mercy,” was completely lost for many centuries until it was excavated in 1967.

The water source of the Bethesda pool was a nearby intermittent spring. At times, water would be released in surges from hidden reservoirs in the hills around the city, causing the spring to bubble up and sink down rapidly. This natural phenomenon gave rise to a local legend: An angel comes down from heaven and stirs the water. And, when the water is troubled, the first person to get into the pool would be miraculously healed of any sickness he or she had. So, the pool attracted many people with various dis-

eases. As recorded in the Gospel of John, a great crowd of people - the sick, the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed came and sat by the pool, waiting for the water to rise, hoping for a miracle of healing.

It was a scene that is probably similar to what is happening in Lourdes in southern France today. Lourdes is one of the world's most important sites of religious pilgrimage and tourism with around 6 million visitors every year. It was a quiet, modest town of about 4000 people until 1858 when a 14-year old local girl claimed that Mary, the mother of Jesus, appeared to her 18 times. The spring water from the grotto where Mary appeared is believed to have healing power. So, many of the visitors to Lourdes are people with chronic illnesses and their caregivers. Though there have been many stories of miraculous healing taking place there, the Roman Catholic Church has officially recognized only 69 cases.

My husband and I had an opportunity to visit the famous town 4 years ago. Truly, it was an incredible experience to witness the reverence and sincerity of so many pilgrims who came from all over the world with the sole purpose of praying for healing of their own or of their loved ones. While many of them were first time visitors, many others had been there for months, even for years, hoping for a miracle.

I am sure, like today at Lourdes, miraculous healing did take place at the Bethesda pool. When people go to such places, believing that healing happened there and that it can happen to them, too, many of them are actually healed. So, as word spread, the Bethesda pool became a place known for healing, a place of hope where those in need of a healing miracle came to be healed.

And so it is to this place of healing miracles that Jesus came and found the man in today's miracle story -- picked out in a crowd of people who were sick, blind, lame, and paralyzed. They were all waiting for the water to rise, but this man was lying alone by the pool, too weak and unable to stand and walk. The text does not tell us why he is alone. In the ancient world, to be crippled meant you were unable to earn money to support your family. Because of this, you were often ignored by your own family and community. It was impossible for a person of chronic illness or disability to live normal life.

And we are told that he had been in such a condition for 38 years! He had been there for a long time the text says. Perhaps his friends and family had been there with him, had shared his hope of healing, and had been willing helpers to take him into the water when it stirred. Maybe over the years, they were discouraged, saw the futility of his situation and had given up hope. Whatever the case might have been, the reality was this man was never going to make it into the pool first alone. It was impossible. And yet, there he was, still waiting by the waters. Perhaps this is what drew Jesus to this man. We know Jesus could see into the hearts of people, knew their true intentions. Certainly, he did not have to try hard to discern the hopelessness of this man's situation.

And Jesus approached him and asked, "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus could have simply commanded the disease to depart from the poor man as he did for others. Jesus could have stretched out his hand and touched him to heal the sick man. Jesus could have made a mud pack and applied it on the man's paralyzed legs, as he did for the blind man. Jesus could have helped the man be the first person to get into the pool when the water bubbled up. Instead of doing any of those things, he asked the man a question.

And what a strange question Jesus asked! "Do you want to get well?" Who in their right mind would ask such a question to the person who had been faithfully coming to the pool of healing? What was Jesus was thinking? To a man who had not given up hope for healing after 38 years of disappointment, more appropriate questions would have been like, "How can I help you?" or "May I help you to be the first one to get

into the pool?” or “What happened?” “How did you become crippled like this?” In those days, if one was sick, people automatically assumed that it was because of his or her ancestor’s sin. So, it would have been more natural for Jesus to ask him, “What sin did you or your parents or ancestor commit to be punished like this?”

But, from the answer the man gave to Jesus, we can see why Jesus asked him such a question. To Jesus’ question, “Do you want to get well?” he could have answered simply, “Yes, I do! Of course, I want to get well! I have never given up my hope for healing!” Instead, he said, “Sir, I don’t have anyone who can put me in the water when it is stirred up. When I’m trying to get to it, someone else has gotten in ahead of me.”

In other words, “Yes, I want to get well. I want to be healed. But, I cannot. I have tried numerous times, but never succeeded. I am too weak to compete with others. I have no one who can help me. I am alone. I am giving up...” In the man’s sad answer, we hear much disappointment and little hope. 38 years of powerlessness and helplessness have brought him to a place where he could not see any possibility of healing for him. In his answer, we hear the truth of where life finds him.

Sometimes, we find the man’s answer to be ours. There are times when we feel like miserably failing despite all our efforts to be well in our body, mind and spirit. In the broken places of our lives, to hope for healing can be a rather overwhelming task. So, out of fear of failing, we often abandon our desire to be well, to live a life of wholeness. Because sometimes, we prefer the familiarity of the fear. It brings us a false comfort, but comfort nonetheless. It is a scary thing to give up the security of the present and go boldly into a future of uncertainty. So, while we cling to the present, no matter how disappointing or painful it may be, no matter how broken or unhealthy our present life may be, it becomes all that we know.

When the Ebola epidemic spread through West Africa several years ago, officials soon realized that the solution was not only finding the right medicine and treatment for the deadly virus, but also overcoming the fear people had about receiving treatment. Due to cultural issues, distrust of medical authorities, and other complicated reasons, people hid their family members who were infected by the virus, instead of taking them to the hospital. When medical teams attempted to find those people who were infected, they were confronted by the resistance of the communities hiding them. People were more afraid of the medicine than they were of the Ebola. Out of fear, they refused the help that they need and was offered to them.

To get well, to experience wholeness in life, we must give up the idea that our life is in our control. We must admit that we need to be healed. And to do so will require us to face our fears. We may even have to admit that our own efforts have made things even worse. To allow ourselves to be embraced by God’s love, we must face the truth of ourselves - how desperately we long for it. To be made whole, we must grow discontent with the current conditions of our lives and want something more.

“Do you want to get well?” This is the timeless question that lingers with us even this morning. It is asked by the light of the world, who shines a light on us and the hopeless situations of our lives. Will we have the courage of the sick man? Will we have the courage to admit our present condition to our great physician and healer? Will we have the ears to hear Jesus, who tells us, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

Thanks be to God! Amen.