

Psalm 67
John 5:1-9
Text: John 5:7-8

St. John's Presbyterian Church
Devon, Pennsylvania, 19333
Victor M. Wilson, D.Min., Pastor

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STARTING OVER

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." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." *John 5:7-8*

What has a pool in Jerusalem, a man crippled for years, and an oddly obtuse command by Jesus, got to do with confirmation? Let's see!

Imagine a pool shaped like an amoeba but bigger than a football field. That was the pool of Bethzatha (formerly called Bethesda). Through the middle of the pool was a covered walkway under which the sick might shelter from the hot sun on their reed mats. This is just as the text describes it (it was rediscovered a few years ago). The pool was deep enough to swim in, in fact its name means "to dive into."

Beside this pool the unnamed man lay, carried there each day by friends and relatives. He had been sick for longer even than Jesus had been alive. Fed from an underground stream, periodically the waters would foam and swell with life as pockets of air escaped to the surface, stirred, as was supposed, by a healing spirit or angel, so that to enter the pool at that precise moment was to be healed. Suggestion is a powerful thing. Imagine going hitless for four games, then losing your cleats only to borrow a ratty old pair at the last second—from someone you just don't get along with, then hitting four home runs in three games. You're probably going to wear them till the cleats drop off, that's what. But first you have to get past something in yourself. From a human perspective, what Jesus tells the man to do is absurd, "Get up and walk." Many of us would be tempted to respond, "Duuuhhh ...! But I can't walk. That's the whole point. If I could walk I wouldn't be here!"

The power of suggestion, of identification with something or someone that you come to believe in is enormously potent. Someone loaning you a pair of shoes doesn't do it. Putting them on does. You have discovered for yourself that putting on Jesus is transforming. It's all over your beautiful statements of faith. You have clothed yourself with him this day, and it feels good.

But the man in our story does two things. First, Jesus seldom heals unless

he detects a consent or what we call “faith.” It isn’t in everyone. Not everyone wants to be made whole. For some, dependency is its own addiction. In other words, the one who is afflicted, sick, whatever, has to agree, “I know you can help me be changed into what I should be, but I sort of like doing the things I do.” So the second thing is cooperation. We get well when we take the initiative and go to the physician, take the medicine, submit to the discipline of rest or treatment, act on good counsel. It takes two hands to get well, the healer and the healed. Otherwise it’s like trying to climb a rope with one hand.

“Take up you bed and walk!” Let go of whatever disables you. “I give you the power to get up and walk!” He does not heal, then hope for our cooperation. It is when we cooperate that he heals. The two go hand in hand. To the man whose friends tore a hole in Jesus’ roof to lower him through (Mark 2), Jesus says, “Stand up, take your mat and go to your home.” To the man born blind (John 9) Jesus made a clay poultice of earth and saliva, spread it on the man’s eyes, and told him to go to a certain pool and wash it off, and only after he obeyed was his sight restored. To the ten lepers on the road, Jesus says, “Go to the priest and show what God has done for you,” and it is on the way there that they discover they are healed, while only one of them, you may recall, returns to Jesus to give thanks. Remember how we said, “The answer is the journey. Paul does not write, Christ can do all things through me, but “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.”

Before this day, you who have been confirmed were all children in faith. Like the man in the miracle story, for years you have been brought here by others, by family and friends, and your faith was fed to you in Sunday School and fellowship like family meals that suddenly appeared on the kitchen table. From this day you are adults in faith. You are responsible to find your own nourishment in Christ, and to feed others. Until this day you were on the baptized roll of the church. As of this morning you are moved to the active roll, with all of the rights, privileges and responsibilities of adult membership. Before this day, others carried you in faith. Now you must get up and walk in your own faith.

This is a day of new beginnings. We are immensely proud of you. We love you, and we are pledged always to be your companions in Christ.

Now—go and claim your inheritance.

Amen.