

Jesus is at the pool by the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem. The pool, fed by an unground spring is considered a place of healing. So we can imagine those seeking healing are gathered around its edges waiting for the waters to be disturbed by the spring so that they can be the first to immerse themselves in its healing powers and be made well. In antiquity it was thought that an angel was stirring up the waters and the first person to enter the waters at that time would instantly be made well. Jesus walking by the pool and seeing the people there chooses one man out of many to say, "Do you want to be made well?"

And the man's response is really an excuse. He tells Jesus that, "I have no one to put me into the pool when the waters are stirred up, and while I am making my way another steps in ahead of me." (John 5:7) For 38 years this man had been ill. His identity may have been shaped around his physical condition. The scripture tells us that he is alone at the pool; there is no one to help him enter the healing waters. Perhaps Jesus noticed that he was lying there by himself. It was in the man's loneliness that Jesus met him. "Do you want to be made well?" "Do you want to have your life changed?"

Jesus doesn't give him a choice, he tells the man to, "stand up, take your mat and walk!" The man did not express any faith what so ever in Jesus. Jesus chooses to heal him anyway. Jesus doesn't put him in the healing waters, he just tells the man what to do. and "at once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk." (John 5: 9) The man in his loneliness and physical state was vulnerable to God's grace working in his life. Jesus compassion and healing are not reserved only for those who believe in him, this man had no idea who Jesus was, but Jesus healed him anyway. Jesus heals him because that is the work that Jesus did and continues to do in the world.

Do you want to be made well? The man was alone at the pool. There was no one to put him into the healing waters. Perhaps the man's emotional state prevented him from even attempting to be healed. Jesus met him in his isolation, even though there were people all around him, there was no one to help him find the healing that he needed. I wonder how many times we have been with someone and had no idea that the other person was suffering. Jesus saw the man's condition and met him there, just as he met Peter on the beach and forgave him for his denial. He restored Peter to wholeness that morning, now he is restoring this man to wholeness. Jesus says to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk!" This is not the first time that Jesus has healed someone by saying these words. In the Gospel of Mark we find, *then some people came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them. And when they could not bring him to Jesus because of the crowd, they removed the roof above him; and after having dug through it, they let down the mat on which the [man] lay.* (Mark 2:3-4) Jesus tells the man to, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." *And he stood up, and immediately took the mat and went out before all of them; so that they were all amazed and glorified God.* (Mark 2: 12) It was the man's friends that brought him to Jesus. The man's life was changed.

We are Jesus' healing presence in our world. As individuals and as a church we are called to notice those who need healing, those who are suffering with loneliness and isolation, those who have no one to speak for them. As a church we are called to pray for each other, to ask God's healing grace upon each other and our world. The God that Jesus

reveals though his actions does not discriminate; Jesus incarnates a God who wants everyone to have abundant life. How that life is lived maybe different for each person, but God does not discriminate. God loves everyone, no exceptions.

As followers of Jesus we are called to accept that all embracing love for ourselves as well. Jesus told his followers to love others as we love ourselves. Jesus asks us as well, “Do you want to be made well?” As individuals and as a church, the question is do you want to change, to grow? Or are you content to be as you are. That is the question that Jesus put before the man at the pool and the question that he puts to each one of us. Each of us has some place where we are hurting and in need of healing. Jesus says, “Do you want to be made well?” because it will change you.

Two years ago I was asked to be the chaplain at ODU for the Episcopal Church, the ministry was not doing well and the Bishop told me to close it down if I thought that was what needed to happen. The energy when I got there was dark and there were constant obstacles to improving the situation. A man with mental illness showed up several times, a hoarder was using the space. A gang attacked the tenants of one of the rental properties. So I prayed and asked God what the ministry at ODU should look like. I called the police on the man with the mental illness and got the hoarder and her stuff removed from the building, but she also got help for her condition. We repaired the rental property and new students moved in. New students began to come, each Sunday evening we gathered for dinner and Eucharist by candlelight with lots of incense. We held noonday prayer during the week and began doing guided meditations. Another Christian group used the space for their weekly Bible study. This semester at one event a participant asked if we had remodeled the Canterbury Center because it was so much brighter. No we had not, but God had. By praying, listening and acting on what God wanted to see happen at the Center the obstacles were cleared away and a renewed ministry came forth. We are ending this semester with 17 actively engaged students and for the first time planning events together for the summer. It took work, but like the man at the pool, the Center is now standing up and providing a place of healing and spiritual growth to the ODU community.

Good Samaritan has also stood up and engaged the community in new ways. We are close to breaking ground on the Family Life Center with Enoch Baptist. We will provide a safe place for the neighborhood children to be once again this summer. The Korean church found a place to be planted and nourished this past year. Christ asked us, ‘do you want to be made well?’ and we as a church have said, yes Lord! May Christ continue to change us, to use us to bring healing and wholeness to our world.