

John 5:1-9
March 27, '11

"DO YOU WANT TO BE MADE WELL?"

(Before scripture)

OUR SCRIPTURE READING THIS MORNING IS FROM JOHN'S GOSPEL.

IT'S AN UNUSUAL PASSAGE & PART OF WHAT MAKES IT UNUSUAL IS THE FACT THAT, DEPENDING ON THE TRANSLATION YOUR READING, THE VERSES MAY BE DIFFERENT.

THE KING JAMES VERSION INCLUDES A VERSE 4 THAT ISN'T IN OUR PEW BIBLE & ISN'T FOUND IN MOST MODERN TRANSLATIONS.

IT USUALLY APPEARS AS A FOOTNOTE.

THE REASON IT'S BEEN OMITTED IS BECAUSE IT DOESN'T APPEAR IN THE MOST RELIABLE MANUSCRIPTS OF JOHN'S GOSPEL.

IT APPEARS AS THOUGH THIS VERSE WAS INSERTED BY LATER SCRIBES TO HELP US UNDERSTAND WHAT JOHN'S FIRST READERS WOULD HAVE ALREADY KNOWN.

THERE WAS A LEGEND THAT AN ANGEL WOULD PERIODICALLY STIR THE WATERS OF THE POOL OF BETH-SATHA AND THE FIRST PERSON TO ENTER THE WATER AFTER THE STIRRING WOULD BE HEALED.

LET'S READ ABOUT THIS IN JOHN 5:1-9.

(After scripture)

A FRIEND OF MINE WAS GOING TO A COLLEGE FOOTBALL GAME.

IT WAS THE LAST GAME OF THE YEAR & TWO BITTER RIVALS WERE PLAYING.

THEY WERE BOTH UNDEFEATED & PLAYING FOR THE CONFERENCE CHAMPIONSHIP.

STEVE'S BROTHER, TREZ, WAS JOINING HIM FOR THE GAME FROM ANOTHER STATE.

IT WAS A NAIL-BITER & IN THE LAST SECONDS THE SCORE WAS TIED.

A TIME-OUT WAS CALLED FOR ONE FINAL PLAY.

TREZ LEANED OVER TO STEVE AND, AMID THE ROAR OF THE CROWD, ASKED HIM A QUESTION.

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT QUESTIONS DURING LENT THIS YEAR.

WE'RE TALKING ABOUT THE QUESTIONS JESUS ASKED.

THERE'S SO MUCH THAT CAN BE LEARNED FROM HIS QUESTIONS BECAUSE – WHETHER THEY'RE ASKED OF HIS FRIENDS OR HIS FOES – WHETHER THEY'RE ASKED PUBLICLY OR PRIVATELY – WHETHER THEY'RE ASKED RHETORICALLY OR IN GENUINE SEARCH OF AN ANSWER – THE QUESTIONS OF JESUS ARE PROFOUND.

FOR THE MOST PART, THEY'RE QUESTIONS THAT, IN ESSENCE, JESUS IS ASKING YOU & ME.

DURING THE TIMEOUT OF THAT FOOTBALL GAME – WITH A CHAMPIONSHIP HANGING ON THOSE FINAL MOMENTS, HERE'S WHAT TREZ ASKED STEVE- *"WHAT TIME DOES THE CBS EVENING NEWS COME ON HERE?"*

SERIOUSLY!

THAT REALLY HAPPENED!

I'M NOT SURE WHERE TREZ'S HEAD WAS AT THE TIME, BUT IT OBVIOUSLY WASN'T ON THAT FOOTBALL GAME!

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, IT WAS A RIDICULOUS QUESTION TO BE ASKING!

SO IT SEEMS WITH THIS QUESTION JESUS ASKS THIS MAN LYING NEAR THE POOL OF BETH-ZATHA.

"DO YOU WANT TO BE MADE WELL?"

UNDER THE CIRCUMSTANCES, THIS IS EVERY BIT AS RIDICULOUS AS THE QUESTION TREZ ASKED STEVE!

IT'S THE EPITOME OF *"POLITICAL INCORRECTNESS!"*

HOW DO YOU RESPOND TO A QUESTION SUCH AS THIS?

"OH, NO THANKS, BUDDY! I'M CONTENT TO JUST SIT HERE EVERY DAY LIKE I'VE DONE FOR THE PAST 38 YEARS. I ENJOY NOT BEING ABLE TO WALK. I MUCH PREFER JUST CRAWLING AROUND ON MY HANDS & KNEES & BEGGING FOR EVERYTHING I'VE GOT! DO I WANT TO BE HEALED!?! WHAT DO YOU THINK?!"

IT'S A RIDICULOUS QUESTION – A PREPOSTEROUS QUESTION.

BUT WE KNOW THAT JESUS NEVER ASKED QUESTIONS WITHOUT A REASON.

HE WAS ASKING A SERIOUS QUESTION OF THIS MAN.

DAVID BAILEY'S FATHER - THE NEW TESTAMENT SCHOLAR, KENNETH BAILE LIVED A GOOD PART OF HIS LIFE IN THE MIDDLE EAST.

HE SUGGESTS THAT THE REASON FOR THIS QUESTION WAS THAT THE MAN POSSIBLY HADN'T THOUGHT THROUGH THE RAMIFICATIONS OF BEING HEALED.

BAILEY SAYS, *"THE REASON FOR THE EXAM IS TO SAY TO THE PARALYTIC, 'YOU HAVE SURVIVED AS A BEGGAR FOR YEARS.*

IF HEALED, YOU WILL HAVE YOUR LIVELIHOOD STRIPPED FROM YOU BECAUSE NO ONE WILL GIVE TO A HEALTHY MAN.

ARE YOU READY FOR THE NEW RESPONSIBILITIES THAT WILL COME WITH HEALING?"

I DON'T KNOW ABOUT YOU, BUT MY FIRST REACTION TO THAT IS THAT BAILEY IS BEING A BIT OVERLY-HARSH.

NO ONE WOULD TAKE PARALYSIS OVER WHOLENESS.

EVERYONE WANTS TO BE HEALED OF THEIR AFFLICTION.

BUT, AS I THOUGHT ABOUT IT A BIT LONGER, I REALIZED THAT I'VE BEEN GUILTY OF THAT MYSELF & I CAN THINK OF MORE THAN ONE OCCASION WHEN THAT CRIPPLED BEGGAR HAS BEEN ME.

WHEN I WAS JUST BEGINNING HIGH SCHOOL, I STARTED TO RUN WITH THE CROSS COUNTRY TEAM.

THERE'S NOTHING UNUSUAL ABOUT THAT.

HUNDREDS OF ENTERING HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS RUN CROSS COUNTRY.

ME DOING THAT WAS DIFFERENT, THOUGH, BECAUSE A FEW YEARS BEFORE, I HAD BEEN DIAGNOSED WITH RHEUMATIC HEART DISEASE & I'D BEEN TOLD BY MY DOCTOR THAT I COULDN'T ENGAGE IN ANY STRENUOUS PHYSICAL ACTIVITY.

I WASN'T EVEN ALLOWED TO TAKE GYM CLASS IN JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL.

I GOT AROUND IT WITH MY PARENTS BY TELLING THEM I WAS THE MANAGER OF THE CROSS COUNTRY TEAM & THAT'S WHY I WASN'T COMING HOME RIGHT AFTER SCHOOL.

AS WE ALL KNOW, OUR SINS WILL EVENTUALLY FIND US OUT – AND IT SEEMS LIKE THEY'RE OFTEN FOUND OUT IN A BEAUTY PARLOR OR BARBER SHOP.

IN MY CASE, IT WAS THE BEAUTY PARLOR.

ONE DAY, MY MOTHER WAS GETTING HER HAIR DONE, AND A FRIEND WHO WAS THERE SAID, *"I SEE DENNIS IS RUNNING CROSS COUNTRY."*

MY MOTHER SAID, *"NO, HE'S THE MANAGER FOR THE TEAM."*

HER FRIEND SAID, *"WELL, I BEG TO DIFFER WITH YOU, BUT HIS NAME IS RIGHT HERE IN THE PAPER FOR RUNNING IN A RACE."*

NOW, LEST YOU THINK MY NAME WAS IN THE PAPER FOR WINNING SOME BIG RACE, IT WAS A LITTLE LOCAL PAPER & THEY PRINTED THE NAME OF EVERYONE WHO HAD RUN IN THE RACE.

AS I RECALL, I FINISHED 29TH IN A FIELD OF 30 & I WILL FOREVER BE INDEBTED TO A GUY NAMED JIM FOR BEING THE ONLY RUNNER TO FINISH BEHIND ME!

NOW, OBVIOUSLY MY MOTHER & I HAD A RATHER SERIOUS CONVERSATION WHEN SHE GOT HOME BUT SHE ALLOWED ME TO GO SEE THE DOCTOR BEFORE COMPLETELY GIVING UP MY RUNNING.

THE DOCTOR EXAMINED ME & TO HIS SURPRISE, FOUND MY HEART MURMUR WAS LESS PRONOUNCED & HE DECIDED THAT I COULD CONTINUE RUNNING AS LONG AS I DIDN'T HAVE ANY PROBLEMS.

THIS WAS WONDERFUL NEWS, WASN'T IT?

WELL, TO BE HONEST, I DIDN'T THINK SO.

YOU SEE, I WANTED TO KEEP RUNNING WITHOUT BEING HEALED.

WHEN SOMEONE WOULD ASK ME WHY I WAS SUCH A LOUSY RUNNER, I WANTED TO BE ABLE TO SAY, *"WELL, YOU SEE, I'VE GOT THIS HEART PROBLEM & THAT'S WHY I'M NO GOOD!"*

BUT THE DOCTOR HAD TAKEN THAT AWAY FROM ME.

HE'D REMOVED MY EXCUSE FOR FAILURE.

I COULDN'T BLAME MY HEART ANYMORE.

NOW IT WAS UP TO ME.

WHEN I WAS REALLY HONEST WITH MYSELF, I HAD TO ADMIT THAT I LIKED HAVING AN EXCUSE FOR NOT BEING ALL THAT I *COULD* BE – FOR NOT DOING EVERYTHING I WAS CAPABLE OF DOING.

I'VE THOUGHT OF THAT A LOT OVER THE YEARS & RECOGNIZED IT'S TRUE IN OTHER AREAS OF MY LIFE AS WELL.

WHY DO I LIKE SNOWSTORMS SO MUCH?

I MEAN REALLY BIG - "STOP THE WORLD" SNOWSTORMS.

IT'S PARTIALLY BECAUSE WHEN THERE'S SO MUCH SNOW, NO ONE CAN DO ANYTHING, THERE ARE NO EXPECTATIONS THAT CAN BE PLACED UPON ME.

I DON'T HAVE TO FEEL GUILTY ABOUT DOING NOTHING!

SO MAYBE THIS QUESTION JESUS ASKS THE PARALYTIC ISN'T REALLY SO PREPOSTEROUS AFTER ALL, IS IT?

AND, YOU KNOW, I CAN'T HELP BUT WONDER ABOUT US AS WELL.

IF YOU'RE REALLY HONEST WITH YOURSELF, AREN'T THERE CRUTCHES THAT YOU LEAN ON THAT KEEP YOU FROM DOING ALL THAT YOU CAN DO & BEING ALL THAT YOU WERE INTENDED TO BE?

WHAT'S YOUR CRUTCH?

WHAT'S THE CRIPPLING DISEASE THAT JUST HOVERS OVER TOP OF YOU & KEEPS YOU CONVENIENTLY PARALYZED?

IS IT MONEY?

YOU JUST DON'T HAVE ENOUGH TO DO WHAT GOD INTENDS YOU TO DO?

IS IT TIME?

YOU DON'T HAVE ENOUGH OF IT TO BE WHAT GOD INTENDS YOU TO BE?

IS IT OBLIGATIONS & RESPONSIBILITIES?

WHAT CRUTCH ARE YOU USING THAT PREVENTS YOU FROM LIVING YOUR LIFE TO THE FULLEST?

WHAT DISEASE SERVES AS A CONVENIENT EXCUSE TO HOLD YOU BACK FROM BEING THE PERSON GOD IS CALLING YOU TO BE?

YOU'VE BEEN PARALYZED INTO INERTIA AND, LIKE THAT MAN AT THE POOL OF BETH-SATHA, YOU JUST KEEP GOING BACK AGAIN – DAY AFTER DAY – DOING THE THINGS YOU'VE ALWAYS DONE & YOU WONDER WHY YOUR LIFE DOESN'T CHANGE.

BUT IF THAT CRUTCH, THAT DISEASE, THAT PARALYSIS WERE REMOVED, YOU'D HAVE NO ONE TO BLAME BUT YOURSELF IF YOU CONTINUE TO LIVE A MUNDANE, MEANINGLESS EXISTENCE.

AFTER JESUS ASKS THIS PROVOCATIVE QUESTION, "*DO YOU WANT TO BE MADE WELL?*," HE DOES PRECISELY THAT.

HE REACHES OUT HIS HAND & HE HEALS THE PARALYZED MAN.

AND THEN HE TELLS HIM TO GET UP & WALK.

BUT HE TELLS HIM TO DO SOMETHING ELSE AS WELL.

HE SAYS, "TAKE UP YOUR MAT & WALK."

NOW THIS, TOO, SEEMS LIKE A RATHER ODD THING TO SAY.
BUT I WONDER IF HE WASN'T SAYING, "DON'T LEAVE THAT THING HERE. GET RID OF IT.
DON'T ALLOW YOURSELF THE OPPORTUNITY TO RETURN TOMORROW & FALL BACK INTO YOUR OLD
WAYS IF YOU DON'T LIKE THE NEW LIFE I'VE GIVEN YOU.
GET THAT MAT OUT OF HERE & REMOVE THE TEMPTATION TO RETURN TO BEING CRIPPLED,
DISEASED & PARALYZED!"
JESUS CAN MAKE YOU WELL.
MAKE NO MISTAKE ABOUT IT.
BUT HE CALLS ON YOU TO DO YOUR PART – TO GENUINELY & SINCERELY WANT TO BE CURED OF
YOUR AFFLICTION.
AND EVEN JESUS CAN DO LITTLE FOR YOU IF YOU'RE SATISFIED WITH THE WAY THINGS ARE.
FAR TOO OFTEN, WE JUST PLOD ALONG IN OUR DEBILITATING CONDITION, CRAVING TO BE
HEALED, BUT UNWILLING TO DO WHAT'S NECESSARY TO ENABLE THAT HEALING TO COME ABOUT.
CARL SANDBURG ONCE SAID, "THERE IS AN EAGLE IN ME THAT WANTS TO SOAR, AND THERE IS A
HIPPOPOTAMUS IN ME THAT WANTS TO WALLOW IN THE MUD."
A PART OF YOU WANTS TO FLY LIKE AN EAGLE, DOESN'T IT?
BUT IT'S FAR EASIER TO WALLOW IN THE MUD.
JESUS STANDS BEFORE YOU & ASKS, "DO YOU WANT TO BE MADE WELL?
DO YOU WANT TO GET RID OF THE CRUTCH?
DO YOU WANT TO BE DELIVERED FROM YOUR DISEASE?
DO YOU WANT TO PUT AN END TO YOUR PARALYSIS?"
WITH HIS DIVINE, HEALING POWER, HE TOUCHES YOU & SAYS, "TAKE UP YOUR MAT & WALK."

AMEN.

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