

A Narrative 32  
May 31, 2015  
Poulsbo  
Pastor Alison Shane

John 5:1-9, 15-17, 19-21

Sisters and brothers in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus entered Jerusalem and found himself by the pool believed to have healing powers. All around the pool were sick people hoping that *this* would be the day they'd be cured. Jesus noticed one in particular who had been ill for thirty-eight years. Jesus asked him, "Do you want to be made well?"

Why would anyone answer "no" to that question?!

After 38 years, it's understandable that Jesus would wonder, though. If you really wanted to be healed, and you're sitting here at the pool, why haven't you made it happen yet? It is possible that the man was quite content with his "salary" as a beggar. It is possible that the man's family depended on that income from his begging. It's possible that, after 38 years, the man would have had no community to return to, no family willing to welcome him home. It is possible that this was the only life he'd known, and he had difficulty imagining any other life.

"Do you want to be made well?"

"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."

The man does not answer Jesus' question, but instead seeks to justify himself.

Jesus hears in the answer, "Yes, but..." and he removes the obstacle. You don't need the pool. You don't need to be first. "Take up your mat and walk."

When Jesus is challenged for healing the man, he replies, "My Father is still working, and I also am working."

We are in need of healing. All of us. In one way or another. We are in need of healing. And often, when Jesus asks, "Do you want to be made well?" Our response is less than enthusiastic.

We have excuses. "Well, I was going to start exercising for my health, but I don't have time." We have fear. "What if it doesn't work? What if I still die?" We have a gut reaction to the prospect of change. "Well...I don't know..." We might not be happy in our illness, but better the devil you know than the devil you don't, right?

Take up your mat and walk.

My Father is still working, and I also am working.

Jesus heals, but healing also requires change on our part, even if it's just acknowledging that cure might not be in our near future, but God brings life even in illness.

Take up your mat and walk.

As a congregation, and as a church, we are always in need of healing.

"Do you want to be made well?"

Our responses are much the same as our individual ones.

We have excuses. "Well, we really should...but...it costs a lot." We have fear. "What if it doesn't work? What if we still die?" We have a gut reaction to the prospect of change. "Well...I

don't know..." We might not be happy in our illness, but better the devil you know than the devil you don't, right?

We can hear the cries of our illness in our ponderings about this congregation. Why is our attendance going down? Why don't I know everybody anymore? Why don't my kids come? Why don't we have a bigger Sunday School like we used to?"

Do you want to be made well?

We answer with a resounding, "Yes!" But when it comes to taking up our mat and walking, we don't want to. We don't want to invite another person so that the pew will be full. We don't want to call that friend we haven't seen in a while and invite them to worship again. We don't want to increase our giving so that another mouth might be fed or another inmate hear the good news. We don't want to give up something we want just because someone else might need something different. We don't want to look at the world around us and create a church that responds to people, because we like the church the way it is, and it just sounds like an awful lot of work to find different ways of doing things. And what if we don't like what happens? What if it doesn't work? We might not be happy in our illness, but it's much more comfortable to lament the demise of the Christian church in America than to change things – especially things we love about the church.

Take up your mat and walk.

My Father is still working, and I also am working.

God is working hard for healing in the church. We just don't always identify what God is doing as "church". Seeing how God is healing and recreating the church is going to take open eyes, open hearts, open minds, and lots of prayer and conversation.

God is working in this place, and we also are working. We are daring to look at Poughkeepsie and the surrounding communities to see how God is at work. We are daring to examine things we do and don't do and see if we are doing God's work. We are daring to ask the questions and face the fears.

God is still working, and we also are working. So we are daring to pray for healing. We are daring to come before God and say, "Yes, Lord, I want to be made well. Show me how you are healing me. Teach me to take up my mat and walk."

Because God is working hard for healing in the church and for healing in your life. Even if it doesn't come in the form of cure, God is calling you into wholeness. God is calling us to wholeness.

"Take up your mat and walk. My Father is still working, and I also am working." God is bringing wholeness and healing to this world, to the church, to this congregation, and to you, and God calls you to participate in that wholeness.