

“Shaken Enough to Be Stirred”
Easter 6, John 5:1-9; May 1, 2016
Congregational UCC, Buena Vista, Colorado
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I. ONE DAY AT THE POOL....

One day, at the Pool. Not the Rec Center, not the Hot Springs, not the motel pool, but the natural, rock-surrounded pool right in town near the Sheep Gate. A pool of 5 alcoves, with *hundreds* of sick and lame, blind and paralyzed folks hanging out in every nook and cranny.

One day, just like any other day, the people waited, hoped, prayed that *this* would be the day. They had no hospitals in those days, in that place. But they *did* have this place where healings occurred. At least, the story was *told* that they did.

For, everyone knew that once in awhile—well.....maybe every few years—the waters were stirred. By an angel. At least that’s what they said. And when the angel stirred the waters, if you could hobble over and get in the water before anyone else, you would be healed!!

Now, of course, this wasn’t a perfect system. For how would you know if it was an angel stirring the water, or simply the ripples caused by the breeze? And how would you hobble over if you couldn’t even hobble?

And one day, this Healer and Teacher known as Jesus, stopped by the Pool. It was the Sabbath and Jesus was in town for a Feast Day. Jesus saw one man in particular—an invalid man of 38 years’ residence by the Pool.

Somehow, Jesus comes to know that he’s a member of the Lifetimer’s Club. 38 years was a long time for anyone, as that was considered old age in those days!

II. DO YOU WANT TO BE HEALED?

And to that one man—Mr. 38 Years Pool Man—Jesus addresses the million dollar question: “Do you *want* to be healed?”

Hullohhhh!!!

Did you *really* just ask that, Jesus? Are you working from a full deck today? *Pretty* sure the whole reason anybody is at this particular pool—as if you couldn’t see for yourself—is because they are in need of healing. People don’t hang around here to get a tan and drink mai tais!

And equally incredulous is the man’s response:

“No thanks, I think I’ll just stay here on my pallet and wait for the waters to ripple. I’ve been here 38 years and I know what to expect and I know all of the other people nearby. True, I’m probably not going to get better, but – you know – I’ve gotten used to being here, so thanks all the same, Jesus but I’ll just lie here.” (Kurt Childress)

“And, did you notice, it’s a little treacherous getting over to the pool, lots of things can trip you up, and I can’t walk, and somebody would need to carry me, and they’d have to have some training in two-person assist, and know the layout of the pool areas, and have the right equipment, and.....”

III. LOVE THEM ANYWAY

And Jesus just blows off all those excuses. He looks beyond the limitations, and lays it down:

“Get up, take your bedroll, start walking.”

And scripture tells us: “The man was healed on the spot. He picked up his bedroll and walked off.”

And in that one act, Jesus blows a number of things out of the water. Not exactly like an angel stirring it to make ripples, but shaking up the status quo, the System, circumventing the excuses, and making ripples of another kind!

*Jesus doesn't do things the "way they're usually done." He doesn't follow the Plan: Wait with the man until the water is stirred and then help him in.

*He doesn't stop to wonder if this man is *deserving*. Is he just working the system? Has he done all the steps to sign up for social services? Followed the advice of his case worker? Is his faith strong enough? Does he believe in the *right* God? The God of Jesus, and give thanks correctly when healed?

*Jesus doesn't allow the man to "stay stuck." Not just stuck on his mat and unable to walk, in a physical sense, but stuck in his victim mentality, wallowing in his excuses, more afraid of the cure than the illness?

*Jesus heals on the Sabbath—completely defying the laws about that. For NEED does not follow any kind of calendar, and Jesus' compassion (like everyone's should) does not adhere to rules, expectations, or that which is "legal but not helpful."

*And, most bizarre of all! Jesus doesn't get to check this one off on the list of Successful Cases!

Look what happens in Part 2: The Rest of the Story:

The day this happened was a Sabbath, **10** so the Jewish authorities told the man who had been healed, "This is a Sabbath, and it is against our Law for you to carry your mat."

11 He answered, "The man who made me well told me to pick up my mat and walk."

12 They asked him, "Who is the man who told you to do

this?"

13 But the man who had been healed did not know who Jesus was, for there was a crowd in that place, and Jesus had slipped away.

15 Then (after Jesus found him again in the Temple) the man left and told the Jewish authorities that it was Jesus who had healed him. **16** So they began to persecute Jesus, because he had done this healing on a Sabbath. **17** Jesus answered them, "My Father is always working, and I too must work."

The man's response and further action could basically be classified as "throwing Jesus under the bus!" It certainly makes a good case for us when we're thinking of helping people (or ourselves) and can throw up the flag of: "We tried this before and it didn't work!"

I know I'm guilty of that on a regular basis. We joke about lines like this being the "Deadly Words of the Church" along with such gems as: "But we've never *done* it that way before!" But, the truth is, we might just be making excuses not that different from the man lying by the pool—not allowing room for Jesus to come in and blow things (and our excuses) out of the water!

IV. WHAT NEEDS STIRRING

And the truth is, we might be more like that guy than we want to admit. And that's not necessarily a bad thing. For, the "Rest of the Story" may be less than stellar—the Tattle Tale scene in the Temple. Which, by the way sure sounds reminiscent of Eve telling the Serpent in the Garden, "Hey don't blame *me* for eating the apple—it was *that guy*, the one you gave me for a partner who *gave* me the apple in the first place!

But the END of the story, does turn out happy, really. For he got to the Temple in the first place on what? His *own* two feet!

Don't forget that *after* he gave Jesus the laundry list of excuses, he *did* have the courage to follow instructions, and allow the healing to happen. There was some cooperation and teamwork there after all:

8 Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk."

9 Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking.

The healing would not have happened if he hadn't listened, followed instructions regarding the mat, and taken that first fateful step forward. And then another. And another. And.....

Kurt Childress puts it: The Greek word for "get well" *hygieis*, has the connotation of becoming **whole**. This man has the guts to be whole. He takes a deep breath and nods to Jesus, "Yes, I want to be whole, healed and well. I know it will take time Jesus. I know it will take work and lots of unlearning old pain-filled habits accumulated over 38 years, and learning new habits. I know it is not going to be easy, but yes, Jesus, make me a whole person."

And Jesus does. No questions asked. No stipulations. No checking to see if he is truly deserving or not. Jesus just heals him. Grace. And the man picks up his mat and walks out of the door to new life. To wholeness.

V. WANT TO BE HEALED OF WHAT AILS US?

A. Ourselves

We might be more like that guy than we want to admit, because we might need to be shaken up a bit before we stir enough to open ourselves to healing. To where we *can* receive what is offered, follow the instructions, pick up our mat that's kept us stuck, and take steps into our newly-created future.

Do you *want* to be healed? Made whole? What does it take to be shaken up enough not just to stay with the status quo, in the comfort zone, play it safe—even struck right where we've been for 38 years!! Clinging to that mat in that corner, knowing we really don't have what it takes—even if some divine being *did* show up to stir the waters, and even if a stranger *did* show up to help us hobble, first in line, to be healed!

B. Our Society

Bruce Epperly challenges us further: "This same question can be asked of our institutions and political system. Do you want to be well? Do you want justice to prevail? Do you want the hungry to be fed and the homeless to be housed, and what are you willing to do to achieve it?"

Getting well requires us to make significant changes in values and behavior. We must be willing to stand up, responding to God's call and move forward in partnership with God's vision of abundant life. As we respond to God's call to health, we must be agents of transformation, trusting God fully, yet actively seeking wholeness for ourselves, our communities, and the planet."

Where are we "shaken enough to be stirred" in our communal life? It would seem that this current election season has gotten many people shaken up enough to get involved in politics and the elections! To "get out the vote," right Beth?!

To attend their first caucus. To work on campaigns. To take a stand publically against language and behavior that has gone far beyond appropriate campaigning for the betterment of our country.

This week, an *amazing* spectrum of leaders from faith communities across the country came together in *unprecedented* form to stand up and say, *enough!* They picked up their mat and walked, trusting that healing was called for in our nation and they were going to be part of making it happen!

The letter is called: **Called to Resist Bigotry —A Statement of Faithful Obedience**

And it is quite a statement—worth the read. I have a copy of this letter if you'd like to see it. I can also email it to you and will make some copies for the sermon box. It's not a one-pager, either! And, what's even more fascinating than the "Call to Resist Bigotry" is the list of names and faith communities represented. A full 2.5 pages in itself! It gives me hope that Christian churches and denominations can *finally* come together and agree on something! It's too bad that it has to be a response to something *negative* and alarming, that has brought us together!

Right here in our own community, we have systems that aren't working as well. Working families and individuals can't find places to live—both because they don't make enough to afford the rent, *and* because those rentals are few and far between! Across the country, full-time employees working at minimum wage can't earn enough to afford a place to live. The system is out of whack.

Do we *want* to be healed? We must ask ourselves as a society? To quit making excuses with mantras like: oh, if they just worked hard enough, people could provide for their families, pay their bills and raise themselves out of poverty and ill-health by doing the right things. It may not be true anyone. If working full-time does not mean you can afford a place to live, or that there even *are* any places to live, then we have a problem as a community, and it's *not* laziness or lack of initiative on the part of individuals.

Who is waiting at the pool, in need of assistance? For the water is deep and help is needed in navigating, especially if one has limitations or waning strength. An assist is needed: for if the timing is not just right, then one might just plunge into a deep hole, unable to get back out! Might drown in the depths in their effort to find new life and salvation.

VI. SHAKEN AND STIRRED:

Are we shaken enough to be stirred. What shakes you up, personally, that you know in your heart *must* be addressed? What societal ills do *you* feel passionate enough about to work on, learn more about, get involved in?

Where do YOU need healing, wholeness, and to have the courage to get up off your mat, out of your comfort zone and start walking into a new day and a new way of living? What kind of "assist" do you need in order to make that happen? Will you ask for help, and accept it when it's offered—even if it breaks the rules?!

That man, Jesus, HE healed on the Sabbath! May it be so, Amen.