

John 5:1-9

King of Glory Lutheran Church

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Christ is the healer; who takes on our sin and suffering. It's hard to understand why some people are healed and some are not. Until Christ comes again, there will be pain and suffering in the world. We are called to be community for those who are suffering.

Who knows why Jesus chose that man. That particular man who had laid by the pool for 38 years. Don't know how Jesus knew he had lain there for that long. But of all the sick people, Jesus chose this one.

Without so much as a, hello, Jesus asks the man a question. "Do you want to be made well? "

We believe that this pool was very deep. And that there was a subterranean stream that ran beneath it. That could've been the cause of water getting agitated. A later manuscript of the story gives the reasoning that an angel of the Lord stirred and agitated the water occasionally. Either way, the belief was that whoever got to the pool first when the water was agitated, would be healed of their malady.

38 years is a long time. If you have ever laid in a hospital bed, or for that matter on your own couch, a week can be a long time. Sometime waiting four hours until you can take medicine again can be a really long time!

After 38 years, perhaps there's no more hope. Perhaps there is a silent resignation for what seems to be an unending suffering.

Jesus asks "Do you want to be made well."

“Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

Many theologians have read this comment as the man making an excuse. He’s not taking responsibility for his disease. It sounds like he is whining.

I hear something else. The man is naming his truth.

In the ancient world, if you were sick, it took away your social standing and community. “Social interaction with family members, friends, neighbors, and village mates comes to a halt. To be healed is to be restored to one’s social network.”<sup>i</sup>

Because he is here at the side of the pool, he has lost friends. No family will come and visit him in this place. He is naming his truth.

Isn’t that often the first step of healing for us? The doctor comes into the exam room and says, “So what’s going on?” A recovering addict goes to a meeting and says “Hi. My name is Bernadette and I’m an addict.” When we name the truth about our brokenness, before God, healing begins.

Jesus then commands the man to pick up his mat and walk. Walk he does. He walks into a new future. He walks back to his family and he will make new friends. He goes back to his community. And the community needs him for their own spiritual growth.

Thomas Halik tells the story of visiting an orphanage in Madras. Abandoned children lay on cots. Their stomachs were swollen by hunger. Their skin was inflamed. One could see their skeletons. He writes, “I felt powerless and wanted to run away; to close my eyes and forget.” I felt “shame at having healthy skin, a full stomach, and a roof over my head....At that very moment, a sentence came back to me from somewhere deep inside: “Touch the wounds! *Put your finger here and see my hands. Reach out your hand and put it in my side...*”

We the healthy and able community are called to come alongside those who are sick and hurting. Because in them...we see God. We encounter God. We pray. We sit with. We honor them. God lives in them.

In ancient Mediterranean cultures, one's state of being was more important than one's ability to function and be productive. Healing meant restoring someone's value and social standing versus restoring them to what they can do. Healing meant having the village around you.

Western medicine views illness as something to be fixed so that someone can be restored to functioning: so they can 'do' things, not simply 'be'. Our value is on whether someone is a productive member of society.

Which leads to one of the challenges of this text for we modern listeners, is knowing that not everyone is healed. Jesus walked by 30 other people by the pool. We can find ourselves asking the question, "Why did God let Uncle Norman die? He prayed to God. Did God not hear his prayers? He had deep faith."

I want to caution you that when you hear people asking, "Didn't I pray enough? Wasn't my faith strong enough?" We take the focus off of God and put it on ourselves. We make ourselves responsible instead of trusting with our very lives, whatever God brings.

It is here that our Lutheran theology is incredibly valuable. Even Jesus Himself, prayed in the garden of Gethsemane that God would take this cup of suffering from him. And yet he still went to the cross and died. We believe that Christ, even when healing doesn't come in the way that we expect, we believe that Christ bears our suffering with us.

Until Christ comes again, it will always be a mystery why physical healing comes to some and not others. There will continue to be sin and brokenness in our world. But in our suffering, we can draw closer to Christ. Perhaps there will be spiritual healing. Perhaps there will be emotional healing instead of physical. Have you ever met anyone who lived with physical challenges and yet was at peace with their condition? Their faith takes them beyond the pain. God gives them an ability to not only function, but live in such a way their suffering isn't the main focus of daily life. Christ allows them to transcend it. And in our state of brokenness, God still takes on our suffering. "Surely he has born our grief and infirmities." God weeps when we weep, God rejoices when we rejoice. For God takes on our suffering and pain. God prays for us. God understands pain, for He died on the cross.

*Walter Wangerin Junior tells the story of the Ragman<sup>ii</sup>.*

Amen.

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<sup>i</sup> <https://www.crossmarks.com/brian/john5x1.htm>. Malina and Rohrbaugh (*Social-Science Commentary on the Gospel of John*)

<sup>ii</sup> Ragman; and Other Cries of Faith. Walter Wangerin, Jr. HarperSan Francisco. Zondervan Publishing House. 1984. Chapter 1.