

October 19th: “Do You Want To Get Well?”

Welcome, my friends, to our series on Jesus and his complicated questions and answers. As we know, Jesus was forty times more likely to ask a question than give a direct answer, so in these ten weeks, we'll be taking a closer look at ten conversations that Jesus had with the people of his time. This series is intended to challenge us and form us to be more like Jesus, so it is my hope this morning that this meditation will give us some wisdom about how to live out these ancient truths in our own modern era.

We're now in the second month of this series, so if you've missed previous sermons, be sure to check out our website—all our sermon manuscripts are posted so that you can go back and catch up, or reread a message that resonated deeply with you. These are resources for you to use as we continue this process of dissecting and discerning together.

Before we prepare to discuss another question that Jesus addressed, I invite you to take a deep breath, and pray with me.

Healing God, our hearts are bruised and our bodies are tired after another week of being human. We come to this moment with both visible and invisible wounds, given to us by our personal relationships, the demands of our culture, and the stress of trying to navigate difficult situations. In this time of reflection, we surrender ourselves to you—asking to be touched with compassion and care. We know that our needs have been ignored for too long, and now is the moment to fully acknowledge them and ask for help. Draw near to us now, invite us into your loving presence, we pray. Amen.

Two years ago, in the Fall of 2023, I had a major arthritis flare due to a convoluted situation with my insurance provider and specialty—and over the course of a few months, I went from a healthy and active person to a bed bound, shell of my former self. Some of you might remember that I told a little bit of that story during a sermon last year related to Chronic Illness and its impact on our mental health, including the fact that there was a mix up

between all of my providers about reordering my expensive medication—which led to me missing multiple doses in a row while trying to figure out how to solve this issue.

Unfortunately, every step of the way was full of obstacles—representatives on the phone who didn't really listen, insurance companies that didn't want to pay their fair share, doctors who blamed each other for prescription confusion, and a pharmacy that just couldn't get it together. And so I waited, in agony, hoping that one day these obstacles would be overcome. To be honest, I wasn't very patient, and I grew increasingly frustrated with this system that didn't seem to actually want people to receive the care they needed. My consistent discomfort meant that I had little energy to fight, but I was still so angry that I had somehow slipped through the cracks, and now my wellbeing was at the mercy of people who did not know me or even try to understand my situation.

At my lowest moments, all I could see were the barriers in place—people, objects, rules, finances—that kept me from being well. All I could see were the hurdles that stood between me and healing. And I felt so demoralized, like things would never get better.

All that to say, I deeply relate to the man that we encounter in this story from the Gospel of John—even though we have very different lives, in very different cultures, in very different centuries, there is something tangible in my life that connects me to the very real distress that he expresses within this passage. It's a text I come back to, again and again, because even though I did eventually receive the medication that I needed, I continue to worry that one day this terrible experience might happen once more. And I need the reassurance of Jesus to help me deal with that fear and uncertainty. I need the Jesus who gets up close and personal with human brokenness.

So let's take a closer look together.

Today our story takes us to the capital city of Jerusalem, because Jesus and his friends were in town for a festival. Like other faithful Jews, they spent time gathering with friends and family members in the temple and town square—mingling, eating, and talking together. This was the first century CE, so the city’s temple complex was known as “the second temple,” because the first temple built by King Solomon had been destroyed by the Babylonians in 6th century BCE. When the temple was reconstructed after God’s people returned from exile in Babylon, a new gate was put in—the Sheep Gate, meant for shepherds who were bringing in their flocks to the marketplace that was attached to the temple. But before the entrance to the gate were these pools—perfect for washing any sheep or other animals who might need to be cleaned before they were sold or sacrificed.

By Jesus’ time, this pool had taken on a new function—it was the place where people, especially disabled people, gathered to wash, even though they would not be allowed into the temple because of their condition. You see, at this time, these disabling conditions were believed to be a sign of sin or negative spiritual reality, so anyone who was suffering from things like blindness, or paralysis, or chronic pain was intentionally separated from the rest of the society. They were outcasts, but this pool was believed to have some healing power—in fact, we see in later manuscripts of this passage that the biblical authors added in some context, and verse 4 read like this: *From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the waters. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.*

At the pool, Jesus meets a man who had been an outcast for thirty eight years, and it is clear that this man was here for this purpose. He had been disabled for almost four decades, and this was his chance to be healed. When Jesus encountered him, the man was waiting for the waters to be stirred up, but he kept getting cut in line by others who also were there for the same reason.

If you have your Bible with you, you can open to John, chapter 5, and we’ll start in verse 6. Here, our gospel author tells us that Jesus came to the edge of

the pool where the man was reclining, and approached him with what appears to be a simple question: “do you want to get well?”

However, I think we know from last week that these so-called simple questions don’t always have simple answers. Pastor Heather talked about how Jesus’ question of “what do you want me to do for you?” often requires us to dig deep in order to respond with true vulnerability, and we might be afraid to voice the desires of our hearts for fear of rejection, disapproval, or the reality of change. It’s not always easy to respond to Jesus’ questions, and I think we see that again here in this passage.

The man by the pool doesn’t respond to Jesus with a “yes” or a “no,” like we might expect. He doesn’t immediately respond to Jesus by saying that healing is the one thing he’s been waiting for, and of course he would like to be well. In fact, we hear that his first impulse is to respond with words of frustration and challenge. He says to Jesus, “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.”

Can you hear the anguish in his words? Can you hear his despair? Can you imagine how he felt as he waited by the pool?

He’s made an attempt to do the thing that will not only heal his body, but reunite him with the rest of Jewish society. He’s trying so hard, but he just can’t catch a break. He’s made it this far, but there’s still obstacles in his way. In this moment, he can’t even consider being well, because all he can see are the barriers in front of him. He can’t even imagine answering yes to Jesus’ question, because all he can perceive is the reasons that wellness has evaded him so far. I like that we get to hear in his own words how this situation has caused him pain—it’s not just his condition that plagues him, it’s the whole system—even the path to healing isn’t easy to navigate.

I think the reason that this passage is so powerful, even thousands of years later, is that many of us can put ourselves in this man’s shoes. This story isn’t

just about a nameless man from generations ago—it's about you and me too. It's about an encounter with Jesus that is possible for every single person—all of us who are in need of divine healing.

Because that's what happens here. Even without an affirmative answer, Jesus responds to this man with healing. In this moment, in this chance encounter by the pool, Jesus offers this man tangible relief from his pain and suffering, and the man is able to fully stand up and walk away on his own. Jesus heals this man's body that had endured decades of stiffness and discomfort. It's truly life changing for this man to be able to move in ways that he hasn't been able to for most of his life. But what doesn't often get talked about is how this physical healing allows for other types of healing too—for this man, being well goes beyond just his physical condition.

In verses 9 and 10, we read that this man who was healed comes into contact with religious leaders. This might seem like a small detail, but it means that this man is no longer isolated like he had been for years. It means that he's in public, engaging with the people who would have ignored him only a few hours earlier. It means he's part of the community again—allowed into sacred spaces, drawn into conversation, and able to participate in rituals and spiritual practices. Instead of being on the margins, he's in the thick of it. For this man, being well also means being included again. The man didn't tell Jesus any of us, or how important it would be to feel connected to other people again, but Jesus knew.

So there's two things I think we should wrestle with as we reflect on this passage and Jesus' question.

First, I want us to dig deeper into what “being well” is all about. What does “being well” mean for you? What does well-ness look like for you in this phase of your life? If something immediately comes to mind, that's great, but if you need some time to unpack this, I would highly recommend setting aside a few minutes this week to journal or pray about this. Maybe physical healing is what you're most searching for, but maybe there's something else—a strained

or fractured relationship that needs reconciliation, a mental health condition that makes it difficult to enjoy life, a conflict within your workplace that causes stress. Maybe there's something going on emotionally or spiritually that is resulting in isolation or loneliness. For some of us, "being well" might feel like fixing those realities or healing those wounds too.

I realize that these answers might be difficult to articulate, just like the answers to the question that Pastor Heather introduced us to last week. But being curious about this is important, because when we are able to more fully discern what "being well" means for us, we have greater clarity about how we might ask for Jesus' help in achieving it. When we understand what "being well" looks like in our own personal story, we might have a better idea of what needs to be transformed in us or changed in our lives.

And second, I think we should be honest with God and with each other about obstacles that might be in the way. If Jesus were to offer you the same question that he offered this man by the pool, are there real barriers that prevent you from being well? What structural or systemic hurdles are contributing to your lack of wellbeing? Maybe like me, you're dealing with a complicated healthcare system that doesn't seem to understand what you're going through, or you feel like you've been overlooked by the organizations that are supposed to provide resources and support. Maybe you're stuck in patterns and behaviors that have led to relational dysfunction, or you've realized that it's not healthy to numb out with substances but are addicted to those means of escape. Maybe you're desperately seeking connection, but haven't found the right people yet.

It's possible that you do want to be well, but you know that saying yes means giving up things that you're not ready to let go of yet. It's possible that you do want to be healed, but you know that it would change some things in your life that you're not ready to change yet.

If any or all of those obstacles are all you can see right now, I totally get it. If being well feels out of reach for whatever reason, I understand. And I'm glad

you're here. I'm glad you decided to be with us this morning to get closer to Jesus.

My friends, here is what I want you to know this week: Jesus draws near to us because he knows that being well, in all of its forms, is the deepest desire of our souls. He knows that whether we can articulate it or not, we want to be transformed. He knows that there are places inside of us that feel hopeless and broken, and he knows that we can't fix everything by ourselves. If we could heal ourselves, we would have done it by now, but we can't.

Jesus asks this question as a sincere and specific invitation, and he's asking you this question today because he wants to be in relationship with you. He wants to be up close and personal with you.

If your answer is "yes, I want to be well," if your answer is, "no, I'm not ready yet," or if your answer is, "There are too many obstacles in the way," Jesus is here to listen. Whatever your response is today, I think Jesus is ready to offer healing. No matter how long you've been hurting, a single encounter with Jesus could change your whole life—one moment with Jesus could mean a whole new future.

So dear ones, "do you want to get well?"

Amen.