

July 8, 2018

*“Do you Want to Be Made Well?”*

John Wesley United Methodist Church

John 5:1-9

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Two thousand years ago in Rome there lived a man named Marcus Cato, known to everyone as Cato the Elder. Cato served Rome in a variety of capacities, and over the years, because of his service and dedication, he earned not only the respect of the Roman populace, but he also became admired and loved. In fact, Cato’s stature and veracity was so impeccable that an idiomatic expression developed among the people. Whenever a Roman wanted to passionately express his doubt or disbelief about a specific subject he would state, “I wouldn't believe that even if Cato himself told me.” In a sense it’s similar to our rather crass, “You’re full of it...,” but much, more well-mannered. “I wouldn’t believe that even if Cato himself told me.”

Well, this summer I'm going to be talking about miracles – the miracles of Jesus Christ. Now some people find the miracles difficult to believe, even though they’re told to us, not by Cato, but by the even more reliable sources of the apostles, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, in their Gospels. And so we need to ask, why, why is there all this doubt about the miracles of Jesus? Like walking on water, or feeding the five thousand, or even being raised from the dead. Well, I think it's because we humans are inclined to doubt things that we can’t see or figure out on our own. But, in reality, there are some things that we can't comprehend but still readily accept because we do, in fact, experience them every day. Who, for example, can really understand this miracle we call the Universe – for example, here we stand on this piece of rock called Earth, hurtling through space. And that is just a fraction of the enormity of it all that's out there. Yet here we are. But we tend to not think about it much, because if we do, it presents so many contradictions and challenges that our minds can literally begin to ache. And of course, we have to face the most obvious... the reality of the Creator God who designed it all, and the power he must be able to invoke. Or, think about human life itself. What is more important to any one of us than our own life, or those of our children or grandchildren? Because life is so precious, and so fragile, and we fear it being lost. When we witness those mass shootings that seem to occur with too much frequency lately, what grieves us the most about it? The finality of it all. That we can't undo death, and create life anew. And yet, every day we witness life anew, the phenomenon of a baby being born, rarely considering that this life evolved from a single infinitesimally small sperm and egg. And the architect of this miracle, as well – our creator God. There are more examples I can give you, both big and small, but the point I want to make is for us not to look at miracles as some scientific investigation or test of your logic, but instead, look at them as the divine workings of an all-powerful God. The Bible tells us,

"My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are my ways your ways, says the Lord. As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts." You see, I think we just need to readjust our sense of proportion. To acknowledge that God is great – and we are small. And the truth is, miracles can happen and will continue to happen – maybe even to you!

So let's look at today's scripture reading about a healing miracle. Jesus is walking in Jerusalem, and comes upon a large pool of water, called "Bethesda." The water that fed this pool came from an underground spring, and every so often the water would bubble up and create ripples. Legend had it that it was an angel disturbing the water and the first person to enter the pool during that time would be healed. So, as you might guess, it was very crowded with the sick, blind, crippled, homeless and hurting, all gathered, waiting for the water to stir. Now just imagine for a moment what it must have been like to be one those people waiting there day after day. I'm sure most of them had given up on any sort of meaningful life and just laid around the pool, morose, begging for a coin in order to survive, hoping for their chance to be made well. And along comes Jesus. Now for some reason – we don't know why – Jesus picks out one particular man who is crippled and had been there for thirty-eight years, and says to the man, "Do you want to be made well?" Then Jesus performs his miracle – he tells the man, "Stand up, pick up your mat and walk." And the man is immediately healed, made new.

Now when it comes to healing miracles, I'm sure the records of many a hospital could probably outrival this story of a cripple. Just look at all the would be "cripples" coming home from the Gulf wars, or those after the Boston Marathon bombings, that got new limbs, a new start, and are leading productive lives. And, I'm sure many of you have your own personal story of being healed. Or one of a friend or loved one. From cancer, from addiction, from sinner to saint, from troubled relationships into loving ones, from cowardice into courage, and so many more. And all of you that have gone down that road to redemption and cure, or know someone who has, is aware of all the struggles and the sacrifices that had to be made and overcome. And you know the faith, trust and prayer that's involved. So I really don't need to expand on the actual physical healing aspect of this miracle. It happened and you can believe it. But there are two very important lessons from this miracle that all of us should take home today.

The first lesson centers on the man himself. Interestingly, when Jesus asked the man, "Do you want to be made well?" the man never really answered Jesus in the affirmative. There was not a "Yes I do!" There was no "Please Lord, heal me and I'll change, I'll follow you, I'll do anything." There wasn't

even a sarcastic, “Well, what do you think? I’ve been here thirty-eight years for crying out loud.” Instead he just complains, “I have no one to help me get into the water. Someone always gets there ahead of me.” So you might be asking yourself, why did Jesus choose to heal this man in the first place? Someone who seems – relatively – undeserving. There's no mention of any faith whatsoever on his part. He offers no gratitude or appreciation toward Jesus. And yet, Jesus goes ahead and heals the man and makes him well. And this is the first lesson for us. For here we see that Jesus pours out his healing grace fully and unconditionally, regardless of one’s worthiness. Regardless of who we are or what we’ve done. You see, Jesus healed the man not because of who the man was, but because of who Jesus is! Let me repeat that... Jesus healed the man not because of who the man was, but because of who Jesus is! And that friends, is good news for all of us! Many of us are afraid to come boldly before God with our prayers, our needs, because we feel unworthy. Or we have a loved one we know feels this way. Ashamed to make a request from God. But, if you think like this – here's a thought to consider... though I may be a great sinner, and we all are, Jesus Christ is an even greater savior. And that's what matters most! We have a God who gives to us freely because He loves us unconditionally. As the saying goes, "God does not make junk." You see, God's love doesn't seek value, God’s love creates value. Value that can make us whole, make us well, no matter what we may be suffering!

The second lesson has to do with hope. Now the opposite of hope is despair. And nothing separates us more from God than those things that cause us despair. And, in truth, just like the crippled man in today's lesson, we are all crippled by something. Crippled by regrets of the past, by resentments toward others, by anger, by fear of failure, by depression, by our prejudices. We’re crippled by worry, by stress, by addiction, by loneliness. These things weigh on our hearts and minds, and like that man, it's easy to feel stuck in our condition. And we can’t see any way out. Remember, the crippled man gave Jesus excuses for why he couldn’t be healed. “There is no one to help me, someone always gets there ahead of me, this is my lot in life.” Does that sound like us in some ways? When the things of this world get us down and we lose hope, it’s easy to give up, do nothing. But Jesus is there ready to offer us his miracle of healing. Listen. Can you hear him asking you, “Do you want to be made well?” Do you? “Then stand up, pick up your mat and walk.” But will you? You see, the thing is, most of us fear the cure more than the illness. Because a cure means we have to start being responsible. We have to move on, move forward, start living our life with joy and purpose and hope. And here’s the second lesson. When we cease being a victim – “I can’t get to the water Jesus; there’s always someone else who gets there first” – and start becoming responsible, a greater miracle can occur. Just maybe our legs

become strong enough for us to walk beside others who are in pain and now need our help. Just maybe our arms are empowered to embrace our enemies and the outcasts. Just maybe we no longer make excuses; but instead we walk forward to new life in Jesus Christ and go to work serving and healing and living a life filled with joy and fullness and, especially, hope.<sup>1</sup>

Like I said earlier, God is great and we are small. And miracles happen and will continue to happen. Maybe even to you! May you believe. Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> [Courage to be Whole.](#) (John 5:1-9) Kyle Childress, *The Ekklesia Project*, 2010.