

Trinity 14 – St. John 5:1-14

The Lord Makes You Whole in His House of Mercy

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We pray: Dear merciful Lord, You alone can heal us body and soul. You alone can restore us to perfect life. Make us wholly dependent upon You. Do not withdraw from us, but call us to arise to a new life with cheerfulness & hope no matter our situation in this life. Amen.

In the name of the Father, and of the ☩ Son, and of the Holy Spirit,

Who makes you whole in this His house of mercy.

Dear fellow redeemed,

[Our sermon text is going to present us with a rather unusual situation, of which St. John does not provide many details.

It's the incident of Jesus healing a lame man at the Pool called Bethesda, which means "House of Mercy."

This pool supposedly had healing powers.

I say supposedly because John doesn't state it to be a fact, but reports the man's belief (or hope) that it did.]

In the 1<sup>st</sup> verse, John talks about Jesus attending a feast.

This was most likely the Feast of Tabernacles/Booths, which was 1 of the 3 major festivals God required all the Jewish men to attend in Jerusalem each year.

This feast was to celebrate the Lord's dwelling with His people Israel as they sojourned through the wilderness for 40 years.

During those years, they traveled in tents and relied solely on the Lord's daily provisions of manna & water.

During those years, you should recall, Israel rebelled often, yet even then, the Lord never withheld His divine provisions.

He showed great mercy upon them and finally led them to Canaan, the Promised Land, and gave it to them.

His mercy gave them much to rejoice in and thank Him for, so while the Lord commanded this festival to be observed, it was for their good, to remember Him and His mercy upon them, not only in the wilderness, but every day.

This part of Israel's liturgical life is a wonderful backdrop to our story because the same merciful God who dwelt with, and sojourned with His people, was doing it again thru Jesus.

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We read as follows in Jesus' name.

After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me." Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.

Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed." But he answered them, "The man who healed me, that man said to me, 'Take up your bed, and walk.'" They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."<sup>(ESV)</sup> So far the Words of our text.

These are Your Words, heavenly Father.

Sanctify [us] in the Truth. Your Word is Truth.<sup>(John 17:17)</sup>

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This seems like a random act of kindness, doesn't it?

There seems to be no small talk, no getting to know each other.

And the interaction is so quick, the man doesn't even know Jesus' name.

Jesus just asked him, "Do you want to be healed?"

(or more closely translated "Do you want to be made whole?")

There wasn't even an expectation of Jesus healing him.

There was no, "Jesus, Lord, have mercy on me."

Just a complaint that he couldn't get into the water first:

He has **no one to put him into the pool.**

In the man's mind, his only hope of becoming whole again

is this pool of water, but alas, no kind friend to help him.

I wonder if he even spoke in sarcastic tone to Jesus, as if to imply, "You probably won't even help me."

John tells us that this man had been struggling with this infirmity for 38 years.

If he was anything like humanity today, after 38 long years,

I'll bet he had lived with many constant temptations.

Temptations of bitterness, maybe even hatred towards God, while feeding a victim complex.

Temptations to resent the many unhelpful neighbors.

Bouts of depression brought on by severe hopelessness.

Attacks of anxiety, even guilt, whether justified or not.

Feelings of uselessness, questioning God's wisdom in letting him go on living like this, a burden to family and society.

How many of you can relate to these possible temptations?

You may or may not be lame or disabled physically.

You may or may not be disabled emotionally or mentally.

You know, even "healthy" "normal" people deal with these same temptations, fears, anxieties, guilt, and feelings of uselessness at times.

And during those times of real or felt disability, whether short or seemingly permanent,

it's easy to look for solutions that seem magical/spiritual, like this man did with the pool, relying on it for relief.

Or to believe that doctors and medications are the only answer.

Or to self-medicate the burdened conscience by drowning it with alcohol, or stoning it with drugs.

And depending on how your personality tends, it's easy to take the full weight of the problem on yourself, and grow in hopelessness because you can't remedy it; or just as easy to find the fault with everyone else, and grow in bitterness and resentment.

Now, it might be true that doctors and medications may help, that someone else is at least partly to blame,

or that you are completely to blame;

But it is important not to give these the attention Jesus' deserves.

Your trust is wholly in the merciful Lord, isn't it?

It's in the One who dwelt with Israel through the wilderness and ultimately brought Israel to the Promised Land.

It's in the One man, Jesus, who made the man in our text whole.

Doctors and medications can serve His purpose, but they do not solve the problem, they don't make you whole.

You see, they can only try to treat the symptoms of our corrupted flesh. They can't heal it.

They can't bring you back to the full unity with God that Adam and Eve had before the Fall into sin.

Did you notice at the end of the text, that Jesus didn't consider the man to be "out of the woods" yet.  
Sure, he had been healed physically, but there was more danger. There was something worse that could happen to him.  
Not just a 38 year life of disabilities, but an eternity of death, of suffering without end, of hopelessness without mercy.

To date, I don't know of any of your pastors here who have performed a single reversal of health from sick to well. But that does not mean that they are powerless.  
We have been given the stewardship of God's powerful Word. In Jesus' stead, as His mouth pieces we ask you Jesus' question, "Do you wish to be made whole?  
Do you desire forgiveness in His name?"

And in the Confession of Sins, you confess your hopelessness. You not only can't make it to the pool, no one can even help you. No one can bear your guilt to any satisfying relief, no matter how much you blame them, or they try to take on. No one can prescribe a medication strong enough to heal the total corruption of your heart. No one can take away your fear and anxiety that something worse should happen to you when this life of suffering ends.

No one that is, except Jesus. And this you confess too.  
Yes, He has the power to heal your physical, emotional, and mental disabilities, whether temporary or seemingly permanent.  
Yes, He can use doctors and medications to improve your health. Yet, you still have them. Is it because He doesn't love you?  
Is it because you haven't been "good" enough?  
Is it because He isn't merciful?

No! He loves you. You know this because He emptied Himself, and took on your infirmities.  
He became full of your fear and anxiety, your distrust in God, your dependence on legal and illegal medications, your bitterness and resentment toward God and neighbor, your victim mentality, your proclaimed self-reliance.  
He drank and emptied God's cup of wrath for you and poured out His blood for you in death, not because you are "good enough" but because you aren't, and never can be.

He is merciful. You know this because when He came upon you, you were not just disabled in spiritual matters; you were dead. Till He picked you up and threw you in the pool of Baptism. This pool truly is, not only healing, but life giving, as the Holy Spirit says through St. Paul,  
**But when the goodness and loving kindness of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of works done by us in righteousness, but according to His own mercy, by the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit, whom He poured out on us richly through Jesus Christ our Savior.**<sup>Titus3:4-6</sup>

Your Baptism seals His promises to you. Your sins are forgiven. The Triune God, Father, Son, & H. Spirit, now dwells with you. The corruption of sin in your flesh is being healed, but you won't see or feel its completeness until the resurrection from the dead on the Last Day. On that day, there will be no fear, no anxiety, no bitterness, no resentment, no feelings of being a burden, no suffering, for Jesus has restored you to perfect wholeness with the Father.

In a sense, we celebrate the Feast of Booths every Sunday, and every day as Baptized children of God.  
Here the merciful God dwells in the tent of your body as you struggle through this wilderness of temptations. Here, in this House of Mercy, the Lord feeds you manna, the Body and Blood of Jesus, not only to heal your conscience, but also to strengthen and sustain your faith. And He is leading you to the Promised Land, eternal paradise where you will dwell in everlasting health and true complete wholeness and unity with God & man.

But until then, here you are, living not only physically but spiritually in the station God has given you. There was a multitude of other invalids at Bethesda, yet Jesus only healed this one man. You are the way you are because the merciful Lord desires you to serve your neighbor at this time in this capacity. Any disabilities you may have, give you the ability to show others the hope you have in Christ. Disabilities do not make you a burden. They make you an opportunity for your Christian neighbors to serve their neighbor in Christ-like self-sacrifice, and an opportunity for your non-Christian neighbors to see Christ's love and thankfulness in you as you receive their care with patience and hope in Christ.  
*Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit,  
As it was... Soli Deo Gloria*