19th Sunday after Trinity

Psalm: 34

34 I will bless the Lord at all times: his praise shall continually be in my mouth.

2 My soul shall make her boast in the Lord: the humble shall hear thereof, and be glad.

3 O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together.

4 I sought the Lord, and he heard me, and delivered me from all my fears.

5 They looked unto him, and were lightened: and their faces were not ashamed.

6 This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles.

7 The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear him, and delivereth them.

8 O taste and see that the Lord is good: blessed is the man that trusteth in him.

9 O fear the Lord, ye his saints: for there is no want to them that fear him.

10 The young lions do lack, and suffer hunger: but they that seek the Lord shall not want any good thing.

11 Come, ye children, hearken unto me: I will teach you the fear of the Lord.

12 What man is he that desireth life, and loveth many days, that he may see good?

13 Keep thy tongue from evil, and thy lips from speaking guile.

14 Depart from evil, and do good; seek peace, and pursue it.

15 The eyes of the Lord are upon the righteous, and his ears are open unto their cry.

16 The face of the Lord is against them that do evil, to cut off the remembrance of them from the earth.

17 The righteous cry, and the Lord heareth, and delivereth them out of all their troubles.

18 The Lord is nigh unto them that are of a broken heart; and saveth such as be of a contrite spirit.

19 Many are the afflictions of the righteous: but the Lord delivereth him out of them all.

20 He keepeth all his bones: not one of them is broken.

21 Evil shall slay the wicked: and they that hate the righteous shall be desolate.

22 The Lord redeemeth the soul of his servants: and none of them that trust in him shall be desolate.

First Lesson: Jeremiah 30:12-22

12 For thus saith the Lord, Thy bruise is incurable, and thy wound is grievous.

13 There is none to plead thy cause, that thou mayest be bound up: thou hast no healing medicines.

14 All thy lovers have forgotten thee; they seek thee not; for I have wounded thee with the wound of an enemy, with the chastisement of a cruel one, for the multitude of thine iniquity; because thy sins were increased.

15 Why criest thou for thine affliction? thy sorrow is incurable for the multitude of thine iniquity: because thy sins were increased, I have done these things unto thee.

16 Therefore all they that devour thee shall be devoured; and all thine adversaries, every one of them, shall go into captivity; and they that spoil thee shall be a spoil, and all that prey upon thee will I give for a prey.

17 For I will restore health unto thee, and I will heal thee of thy wounds, saith the Lord; because they called thee an Outcast, saying, This is Zion, whom no man seeketh after.

18 Thus saith the Lord; Behold, I will bring again the captivity of Jacob's tents, and have mercy on his dwellingplaces; and the city shall be builded upon her own heap, and the palace shall remain after the manner thereof.

19 And out of them shall proceed thanksgiving and the voice of them that make merry: and I will multiply them, and they shall not be few; I will also glorify them, and they shall not be small.

20 Their children also shall be as aforetime, and their congregation shall be established before me, and I will punish all that oppress them.

21 And their nobles shall be of themselves, and their governor shall proceed from the midst of them; and I will cause him to draw near, and he shall approach unto me: for who is this that engaged his heart to approach unto me? saith the Lord.

22 And ye shall be my people, and I will be your God.

Second Lesson St. John 5:1-16

5 After this there was a feast of the Jews; and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2 Now there is at Jerusalem by the sheep market a pool, which is called in the Hebrew tongue Bethesda, having five porches.

3 In these lay a great multitude of impotent folk, blind, halt, withered, waiting for the moving of the water.

4 For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.

5 And a certain man was there, which had an infirmity thirty and eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lie, and knew that he had been now a long time in that case, he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?

7 The impotent man answered him, Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.

8 Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk.

9 And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath.

10 The Jews therefore said unto him that was cured, It is the sabbath day: it is not lawful for thee to carry thy bed.

11 He answered them, He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk.

12 Then asked they him, What man is that which said unto thee, Take up thy bed, and walk?

13 And he that was healed wist not who it was: for Jesus had conveyed himself away, a multitude being in that place.

14 Afterward Jesus findeth him in the temple, and said unto him, Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.

15 The man departed, and told the Jews that it was Jesus, which had made him whole.

16 And therefore did the Jews persecute Jesus, and sought to slay him, because he had done these things on the sabbath day.

Introduction

Jesus asks the man by the pool in our second reading, "*Wilt thou be made whole?"* In the New International Version He asks, "*Do you want to get well*?" The first time I heard this same question was in a group therapy session at a psychiatric hospital in Pocatello, Idaho. I was a freshly minted psyche tech, and I was assigned to take notes for the psychiatrist who was leading the group. There were seven patients in the room, each with a different reason for ending up in a residential treatment program. This question was directed at Carol. She was a middle-aged woman who had a large family, and good insurance. From her chart I gleaned that this was her ninth hospitalization and each time she visited, she stayed a little longer. Her weary husband usually brought her in with tales of erratic behavior and claims she was hearing voices. Private hospitals like Aspen Crest were like hotels. Private rooms, wonderfully cooked meals by a trained chef, recreational outings along with movies and craft nights. It became clear that Carol would rather be here than in her own home, with her hectic and challenging life. It was easy, she did not have to take care of anyone, and all her needs were met. Our resident behavioral expert saw the same patterns and asked her if she wanted to get well and return to her family. He told her she was not doing anything they had asked, not engaging in her therapy, and not motivated to get better. To Carol, the escape, the excuses and the comfort of staying stuck in her situation were far easier

to deal with than the reality of being a stay home mom in a less than supportive marriage. I remember her getting aggravated at any mention of her other life or the steps she needed to take to get there.

In my time at Aspen Crest, and in my experiences as an addiction counselor and parole officer, I heard this question asked many times. "*Do you want to get well*?" I often encountered people who were stuck in some phase of their life in what psychologists call cognitive dissonance. This is state where your words or thoughts are not in congruence with your actions. Hearing someone say, "I really want to be a good father and husband" while also making the choice to use drug and engage in immoral and dangerous behavior. Some people I worked with honestly wanted to change but did not know how to get started or continued to do the same things that encouraged the behavior they wanted to change. Others wanted a different result but were not ready or willing to surrender and still wanted to do it under their parameters and on their terms. Others just needed support, someone who would help them, and to find the strength to get up, pick up their mat, and move forward.

Body

We do not need to be in a psychiatric hospital to become accustomed to our spiritual paralyses, our old habits, our obstacles and our quiet despairs that we stop trying to change or move forward. In our Gospel reading today, Jesus steps into a

place filled with people who are stuck and needing help, the Pool of Bethesda, (Be-thez-da) and asks a question that shatters our comfortable resignation: *"Wilt thou be made whole?"*

In this passage from John's Gospel, Jesus has gone up to Jerusalem for a feast. He finds Himself at the Pool of Bethesda (meaning "House of Mercy"). Ironically, it is a place that does not feel very merciful. It is a crowded pool next to a sheep market, filled with blind, lame, and paralyzed people, all waiting for an angel to stir the water so the one who gets there first can win healing. It is a hospital where only the strongest and fittest achieve restoration. There Jesus finds a man, a man who had been sick and paralyzed for over thirty-eight years. Never being fast, or strong enough, to reach the pool first and achieve healing, he spent his life in dependency, institutionalization, and hopelessness. Jesus looks at him, knowing he has been in that condition a long time. Then Jesus asks a blunt, almost rhetorical question: *"Wilt thou be made whole?* (John 5:6). Jesus looks into his heart and understands that the man is stuck. After thirty-eight years, sickness can become an identity, and it is often hard to get started on a path of healing. Responsibility can feel terrifying and overwhelming. Instead of saying "Yes!", the man offers an excuse: "*Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me into the pool: but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me.* (John 5:7).

He is fixated on the system, the rules, and his lack of a helping hand to guide him into the healing pool.

This connects directly to our Collect for today: *"O God, forasmuch as without thee we are not able to please thee..."* Like the paralyzed man, we make excuses based on our human frailty. We wait for the right conditions, the right resources, or someone to help us, forgetting that God's grace does not wait for our institutional systems to work, the Holy Spirit will *"in all things direct and rule our hearts."*

From verses 8-9, "*Jesus saith unto him, Rise, take up thy bed, and walk. And immediately the man was made whole, and took up his bed, and walked: and on the same day was the sabbath."* Jesus does not pick him up and place him into the pool. He does not scold him for his excuses or lack of effort. Instead, Jesus just speaks and makes the man whole again. The man gets up, grabs his bed, and walks away.

As the man is leaving, he is spotted by the religious leaders who see him carrying his bed, an action forbidden on the Sabbath. The man, excited to be free of his fetter, tells them: *"He that made me whole, the same said unto me, Take up thy bed, and walk."* (v.11) The miracle Jesus has just performed is on the Sabbath. Instead of rejoicing that a man can walk after thirty-eight years, the religious

authorities are incensed. They are so blinded by legalism and religious policing that they miss the mercy and power of God standing right in front of them. The man did not know who it was that healed him, he just knew that he was healed and that a miracle had taken place.

Later, Jesus finds the man again in the temple and makes it a point to tell him, "*Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee.* (v.19) Jesus knew that physical healing was only the outer layer; He was far more concerned with the total restoration of the human soul. Jesus reminds us in this passage that physical relief or outward success is not the ultimate goal. True healing goes deeper than the physical body; it requires the reordering of the human soul toward, and in obedience, to God.

Anglicanism has always emphasized that salvation and spiritual renewal cannot be earned through religious mechanics, or moral performance. Christ comes directly to the paralyzed man where he lies. Grace does not wait for us to figure out the rules or reach the finish line; it interrupts us in our helplessness. Jesus' question to the man "*Wilt thou be made whole*" is a challenge to move past passive victimhood into active participation. When healed, the man is told to pick up his mat and walk. He could have lied there in disbelief but to fully experience what God had done, he needed to get up and move.

God's grace is entirely unearned and meets us where we are; hurting, lame and uncertain. From 2 Corinthians 12:9, "*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness".* It is important to understand that God's grace also demands a response. God does the healing, but we must pick up our mat. Faith without works is dead; God's grace empowers us to live.

Action

Today we ask ourselves, what is your "mat" that you have been lying on for too long? What is the area of your life, perhaps an old habit, a quiet resentment, or a spiritual paralysis where you have grown so comfortable with your dysfunction that you have stopped expecting God to move? I know in my own formation it was necessary for me to move forward, and often that meant surrendering how I wanted to do things and instead accept that God's ways are higher than my ways and I must strive to do His will. It meant trusting God and moving into the unknown. This week I encourage you to all look at why you have been sitting at the pool for so long, expecting things to change, and make the effort to move forward. Examine what action you must take and ask the Holy Spirit to help you, guide you, and make your crooked places straight. From Proverbs 3:5–6: *"Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths"*

Conclusion

In life we will all face challenges and conflicts that will make us stand up short and wonder how we can ever move forward. Jesus is standing by your pool today, asking you the same question: *Wilt thou be made whole?* Stop making excuses, stop waiting for the water to stir, and stop relying on your own strength. Hear His voice, stand up, and walk into the freedom He has won for you. Conflict is often difficult, but it is also what brings about change. I invite you all to experience the radical, unearned grace and mercy of Christ who comes directly to where we are stuck. We are never alone in our struggles, and God wants us to be what He created us to be.

To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen."