

Crippled Man by the Pool

I was at my usual spot by the pool of Bethesda, along with all the others who congregated there. I wouldn't call them my friends because we were more like competitors. You see, the story of the pool was that when it began bubbling, the first one to get in the water would be healed. I now doubt much of that story, like the explanation that it was angels who caused the disturbance and even the curative powers of the pool. When I think about it, in all my 38 years waiting there, the first ones in were never my long-term acquaintances but the "new guys" who somehow always got in under their own power.

But that's not what I want to tell you about. I have to explain the day my life was changed completely. A man, I did not know at the time it was Jesus, said to me, "Do you want to get well?" At first, I did not even think about the question but blurted out my well-rehearsed standard reply to anybody who paid attention to me, "Sir, 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."

It's funny how many thoughts you can have in a moment of time, but as I was speaking (but not answering the question), I was simultaneously thinking about what the question meant. My whole life had been centered on lying by the pool. I was completely dependent, brought every morning by friends and family and picked up every evening. There was enough money coming in from begging to help my wife and now grown children, who had eked out a living since the accident that ended my working career. To be healed would open all sorts of questions about my life, work, relationships and responsibilities.

But Jesus did not point out that I had not answered the question. Instead, He said, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." In an instant the sensation and power returned to my legs and I leaped up, grabbed the mat and walked – getting exclamations and questions from everybody I passed. Many said, "Did you get into the pool?" I said, "No, this man told me to get up and I did!" But there were other comments, not fellow cripples but religious leaders, who said, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat."

That struck me as a bit strange after a miracle had been performed, but I said, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.'" Then they asked, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" Well, I didn't know until I had gone to the Temple, to prepare a thanksgiving offering, and Jesus found me. His comment to me was another strange one, "See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

This reminded me of some of the comments I had gotten over the years from visitors who assumed that I was a great sinner because God had stricken me. It surprised me that Jesus apparently agreed with that view. But as I thought about it I began to wonder if He really meant it that way. We had all heard about the man, blind-from-birth, who was healed, and the way Jesus answered a similar question, "Who sinned, this man or his parents?" In that case, Jesus said, "This happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life."

I think Jesus was talking about spiritual consequences – moral crippling, just as he had talked about spiritual blindness. And, as if in illustration of that interpretation, the Pharisees persisted in their incredible ability to miss the whole point! They had apparently been keeping a book on

Jesus and took everything as yet-another evidence that He was a threat to the whole religious system, of which they were the final arbiters.

Jesus discussion with the Pharisees after that went way over my head, but I had experienced the power of Yahweh and my heart was filled with gratitude and love. I wanted to tell everyone I knew about Jesus and bring them to meet Him. I did not need a doctoral thesis to show me that Jesus was in touch with the God of Abraham, the God of Moses, the God of David! Praise His Holy Name! And I pray for the Pharisees that their spiritual eyes will be opened, and their crippled intellects would be able to stand up and walk in the truth.

John 5:1-47