

Waiting to Live

This poor man at the Bathsaida pool is almost certainly the dullest person we meet in the Gospels. That may sound harsh given that he suffers from some form of immobility that deprives him from walking. What a horrible existence! Family members have probably deposited him and his dirty mat at the pool's edge and then abandoned him. As for the setting, the pool appears to have been surrounded by walls and pillars—sort of a Roman YMCA minus lifeguards. Archeologists tell us there were steps into the water at each of the four corners of the pool.

The scene is crowded. A sorry mob of sick people congregated around the water, which was their only hope for a release from their miserable existence. Legend had it that the waters could heal occasionally when an angel touches the surface of the water. More likely, the pool was fed by an underground spring which burped up water and bubbles periodically. As the legend goes, the first person to get into the stirring water is healed of whatever he or she was suffering from.

It's a sorry scene, very primitive, very third world. The paralytic is most to be pitied. His paralysis nullifies any promise that the pool might hold. Healing comes to the swiftest of the sick ones. Our paralytic can't move. He has no chance of getting into the waters that, in themselves, (let's be honest) have no chance of healing anyone. But that's not what

he believes or wants to believe. And he's been stuck in this quandary for 38 years.

But Jesus walks onto this scene. Now given the pathos of the situation, Jesus arrival is like the sun breaking from behind the clouds. At last! Hope! Possibility! And Jesus walks up to the paralytic. Unfortunately, the paralyzed man appears oblivious to the potential that is standing over him. Jesus' first words to the man cut to the heart of the situation, "Do you want to be healed?" Notice that the man gives an evasive, beside the point answer or excuse that drags the conversation back into his basic stuckness. "Sir, I have no one to carry me down into the water." "Sir, can't you see the dilemma here?" "Sir, a little sensitivity please for a very difficult situation." Seeming to ignore to man's broken record story, Jesus simply commands the man to stand up. Significantly, the man does one incredibly important thing right. He stands up.

But true to form, the man fails to thank or get Jesus' name. Later, when the religion leaders ask the healed man why he was carrying a bed on the Sabbath day, he can't tell them who had healed him. He simply hadn't bothered with that detail. Later, when Jesus seeks the man out and tells him to sin no more, the man makes off to tell the religion leaders that it was

Jesus who healed him. So in answer to the miracle of being released from 38 years of invalidism, the healed man gets caught up on the secondary concern of Sabbath observance.

I can't think of anywhere else in the Bible where we encounter someone who is as unaware or as slothful as this man.

Do you know what sloth is? It's..."whatever." It's..."Oh well..." Sloth is a determined refusal to notice, care about, or take to heart the gift of salvation. It's like being given the greatest imaginable gift on Christmas morning and being just too lazy to open the package.

The paralytic man is amazingly un-attuned to the stunning, once-in-a-lifetime prospect that has drawn near in Jesus. The savior of the world has walked up and the paralytic doesn't notice anything different.

Story of Fred and Deborah

I wonder if you and I face the same choice that Fred and the paralytic in our story did. Our situations may not be as dramatic as that of the paralytic. But what you and I face is nevertheless the same question whether we will settle into a mediocre existence, or will we realize that a marvelous possibility summons us. Will we be consumers of the life and values that our culture offers us? Will we have the same aspirations that everybody else wants—to have lots of stuff and

amusements and maybe 15 minutes of fame? Will you and I lapse into the conventional interests and attitudes? Or will you and I recognize that a whole new order of existence has drawn near in Jesus Christ? Will we recognize and be able to appreciate that a glorious new possibility for living a heroic and consequential life has tapped us—even us—on the shoulder and bid us to be participants?

I don't really know what happened to the paralytic, whether he ever fully woke up to what had happened and what had become possible for him. His obedience to Jesus' simple command reversed 38 years of immobility. Amazingly, he actually could get up and walk. Did the man ever wonder what else Jesus could enable him to do. When Jesus sought him out the second time and instructed him to remember his healing and to sin no more, the man doesn't appear to get that this Jesus was offering him yet another chance for a glorious life. So, we don't know what becomes of him.

The real question is what becomes of you and me. Do you and I get it? In many ways we're like the paralytic being met by Jesus the second time. We've all had some encounter with Christ. Some of us have been born again; some healed; some have been delivered from a sense of moral shabbiness; some have

heard a call to serve others. All of us have stood up a little and walked because Jesus Christ has touched our lives.

Will we get what has happened to us? We the momentousness of who has touched us sink in so that we claim the life Jesus wishes to give us?

It will if we would stir ourselves to recognize and appreciate the gift God has given us by paying attention to us. We can say "thank you, Lord." Will we? We can work to do what Christ asks us. We can ask to be guided. Will we? We can abide in Christ. Again and again in the gospel we learn that sticking with Christ, talking with him, doing what he requests, changes people and changes the world. Will we do that?

Paralysis is more than a physical condition, it's a mindset of settling for a quiet slide through life. Thank God, our destiny is to stand and walk.