

**Church of All Nations
May 25, 2025
John 5:1-9**

John's Gospel tells us that when Jesus came to Jerusalem he didn't visit the temple to worship or the political heavies of the city to seek philosophical discussions; instead he visited Jerusalem's equivalent of a hopelessly over-crowded city hospital

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethesda, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. (John 5:2–3). They are there because first in after the water stirs get healed.

Sounds like an ancient version of Lourdes where the ill, disabled, go to wash in allegedly healing waters. Healing, wholeness, well being and water often go together – restorative waters at modern spas – think Hepburn Springs, Daylesford.

Can you imagine the pushing, shoving, and tripping that takes place as every ailing person desperately strives to be the first into the water? A bubbling from the underground spring or even a breeze could cause a stampede of invalids trying to be the first into the water. What a sight, to see all these people crawling, hopping, rolling, clawing their way to the water's edge. What chaos there would be! And then, even if one person was healed, it would not be the most needy person, because the one with the least ailment would be the most likely one to reach the pool first. The most needy person would be the least likely to get into the water first. Therefore, the least needy would probably be the one cured, while all the rest who made it into the waters second, third, fourth and fifth struggle, still unhealed, to get out of the pool, get back to their mat and await their next chance.

While walking through these corridors of despair, Jesus meets a man who has been been sick for 38 years. The Greek word that describes him as a paralytic literally means, "dried out".

Why him? Well why anyone in the gospel stories. But quite likely it had something to do with him there 38 years. A strangely specific period. Not 40 years which we would have taken as a Biblical shorthand for a "significant and spiritually significant period of time. But 38 years. Something like 13, 528 days of being dried out. If this happened today he would have been lying on his mat by the pool each day since 1987. Since Australia's first mobile telephone call, Hoddle St massacre, Bob Hawke is PM. John Bjelke-Peterson launches his Joh for PM campaign prompting a formal split between the Liberal and National coalition. John Cain is Premier of Vic

Both the Brisbane Bears (as they were then) and West Coast Eagles make their debut. Carlton win the flag and Platten and Locket share the Brownlow.

38 long tedious years and this guy is still waiting by the water's edge. On international scene Reagan challenges Gorbachev to tear down this wall, Rudolph Hess the last of the Hitler's inner circle dies in Spandau Prison in Berlin, largest one day percentage decline in the Dow Jones Industrial Average was not in 1929 but on Oct 19, 1987, the Intifada begins in Gaza

For some life has conspired to dry them out, keep them at the end of the queue, or had to go out to work at 16 to keep the family fed instead of continuing education, or a parent ensnared in addiction or other health issues.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" (John 5:6)

Perhaps the man has gotten so accustomed to his predicament that he has given up any hope of change:

"Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." (John 5:7)

It really isn't too hard to understand how his spirit would become defeated. Not only is he "dried out" in body, his spirit has dried out as well.

I've met a few of this type in my life as a minister. If I am honest I have probably been this person a few times during my life. Pointing out all the very good reasons why something cannot happen, why things cannot change, why I am hard done by and everyone else is getting what is rightfully mine.

Jesus does not buy into his lament that he cannot be healed. So the question remains, "Do you want to be healed"?

The man never answers Jesus and it is not such an easy question as it may appear. At many levels and in a whole range of behaviour we do not always do the best and healthiest thing for ourselves, even though we know what that is. Everything from the food we eat, to the exercise we get, to the relationships we persist with, the habits we cling to, or that cling to us.

But it does not have to be at the physical level. You will know how hard it is to change. Isn't it hard to break out and see yourself in a new way, or to change habits and practices. For a variety of reasons. Why is it that we sometimes lie on mats, under porticoes, by sheep pools, for years and years, and so little changes? Why is it sometimes so hard to "stand upon our own two feet"?

Do you want to get well? Why did he not spontaneously exclaim, "Oh, yes, more than anything"? Why did he focus upon the problem, and not even see the solution who was standing in front of him?

Maybe he was no longer seeing this pool and its surroundings as the place to go to be healed. A place of dramatic and deeply felt transformation. Maybe he was no longer waiting, anticipating, expecting. Maybe the pool and its

surrounds had simply become home. Today we use the term "Institutionalised" -

This story could be a classic story of the principle, "Do what you always do and you will get what you have always get". And in some versions people also add," So we live life to the minimum

It's a strange story, seems almost to have a pagan superstitious layer about the miraculous healing waters being agitated. There's not one word about faith in the story. There's no hint that the man believed in Jesus. And later in this chapter John 5 when the religious authorities are cracking down on this guy for carrying his mat on the sabbath (the mat again! Instead of spending years lying on it, he is now carrying it! Is there something deeply symbolic going on here?)he does not seem to hesitate to throw Jesus under the bus. That guy told me to go around carrying it! Not much testifying or witnessing to the power of God he has just experienced. Not a lot of gratitude. Look I don't think Jesus healed the guy so he could be indebted forever to Jesus and lavish praise and thanks upon Jesus for the next 38 years. But I have found that gratitude is a pretty fundamental quality you find in a certain type of person. It often is found alongside humility in my experience.

Perhaps this is another of those Gospel stories that highlights God's grace. It shows us the undeserved, unmerited love of God. Read from that angle this story tells us more about the healer than about the *heal-ee*. The man is healed, not because of who he is, but because of who Jesus is. It's like Jesus' instruction to "love (our) enemies" – not because of who our enemies are, but because of who we are as Christ's followers.

Finally, in this healing story that occurs alongside a pool known for its healing waters, with its queue of invalids and ghetto of long-term residents, we have a healing that happens apart from all those elements, no pool, no lines, no waiting. After 38 years of being ill, this man's waiting is over. The time of healing is now. There is no waiting for the water to be stirred, for a turn in line, or even for the sun to go down on the sabbath so that the healing of a chronic condition is not controversial. Jesus speaks to the man, and the man picks up his mat and walks.

There is more to the story, but most of it can be summarized with Jesus' explanation of his actions: "My Father is still working, and I also am working."

We will listen to song Wade in the Water by Eva Cassidy. Also listen to hear Jesus say to us, to a habit, an area of your life, an unhelpful attitude or resentment, a decision that needs to be made: 'Enough! Get up! Pick up your mat, and walk'