**The healing at the pool, by Dr Maxwell Reid**

**The New Testament according to John 5: 1-9**

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in HebrewBeth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 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?” 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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Hear what the spirit is saying to the church.

Please be seated

The Gospel of John actually only covers about twenty-two days in the life of Christ, whereas the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke cover the major events of Jesus' whole three and a half year ministry. Two of them also include his birth.

Picture 1 - Sheep Gate

Jesus had come up from the city of Cana to the city of Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover. In Jerusalem there were different gates to enter, and they were used for a variety of purposes. One of these gates was called the Sheep gate. This was the entrance through which the sheep used for sacrifices would enter. So, since Jesus was the Lamb of God who would take away the sins of the world, perhaps it was not coincidental that Jesus entered through the same gate.

By the Sheep Gate there was a pool of water called in Hebrew Bethesda which means kindness, grace or mercy.

This pool was supplied by water from underground springs. The legend was that when an angel stirred up the waters, the first person who entered the pool would be healed of their infirmities.

An explanation that seems plausible is that the water source had a mineral content with medicinal properties. The waters of the spring would be occasionally agitated by the release of these minerals.

We have such pools here in New Zealand in the Ngawha geothermal field which has been well renowned for its pain relief qualities since the local Maori discovered them in the 17th century.

Once Jesus was inside the city, he came to the pool. There lying all around the pool were people who were sick or in some state of paralysis, all hoping to be the first one into the water.

As Jesus moved into the midst of this group, he moved among the blind and the lame, and he was drawn to one particular man who had been ill for 38 years. The man was not asking for Jesus’ help. He didn’t even know who Jesus was, but Jesus asked him a very strange question. Do you want to be made well?

Video

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Do you want to be made well? This was a strong question, because this man lived in a culture and time where there was no Government support for the disabled. Consequently, the more blessed in society felt obliged to help the less fortunate. This man had been a beggar, so he lived his life off the donations of others. Now, if he were healed, he would lose these donations. He would lose the pity of others. In view of this, before he could change, he must decide if he wanted to be changed. If this man were healed, he would then have to be responsible for himself. He would have to find work. It would be a whole new world for him.

Jesus’ question would be the equivalent today of asking a person who had lived on welfare if they were willing to give that up in order to try and get a job – and – hang onto it! Now there would be risk in letting go of that small level of security to become responsible for oneself in a very different future.

Well, we can believe this man wanted to be healed because he was patiently waiting by the pool in the hope that this would happen. The man certainly had character in his persistence, because as difficult as the task was in getting up and getting into the pool, he was not deterred in his tenure of disappointment.

It appears that God had a plan for this man, and John wrote this of particular incident, with the deliberate intent of having his readers see the underlying message in Jesus’ question. “Do you want to be made well” and live with the changes in your life this will mean?

Instantly, as Jesus spoke the words, the man was completely healed. Jesus told him to pick up his bed and walk, thus restoring his capacity for independent physical activity. He did not need to go to "rehab" to learn to walk again, instead he believed Jesus enough to take a chance for a new and different life that was now changed forever.

This philosophical question can have implications for us. Do we want to be changed? Hopelessness, synonymous with depression, can bring disorders such as depression, and we can lack the energy or desire, or even imagination necessary to pursue a cure. The point of this story is that grace of our Lord can come to us. John’s Gospel makes it clear that healing is not a matter of having “enough” faith (as if that could be measured). We have seen here what Jesus can do and we can hold him up as the one in whom we may have confidence, and reassurance, just like this man who walked into a new future, losing his sense of futility and inability to see a way forward. Clearly Jesus does not heal for the benefits to himself in gratitude, praise or devotion. The God whom Jesus makes known is a God who does not discriminate in giving good gifts, our God wills that all may have life, and have it abundantly. No stirred pool is required, when we all live in the power of God’s love, we are no longer defined as broken, unwell, marginalised or left behind. Of course, we all want to be healthy, but that is not an admission of faith. John’s message here is that Jesus is the one in whom we may have faith and confidence. He seeks to reassure those who have grown weary from long unanswered prayers, or tend to be self-punitive in their doubts and struggles. We can all move forward with confidence and positivity in our lives, grasping undreamed of possibilities, if we follow Christ.

Amen