

Title: "Do You Want To Get Well?"

Text: John 5:1-15

Turn with me to the Gospel of John, chapter 5 if you would.

This summer, on the Sundays that I am preaching, I am looking with you at a variety of "Invitations from God."

-The idea for doing this came out of the whole series of sermons we did all this past year on discovering Jesus in the Old Testament.

One of the things that struck me again and again,

-was it seemed that whenever and wherever God shows up in the Bible and makes Himself known to people,

-he is always bringing them an invitation.

-And it's an invitation to come to him, to walk with him, and join him in what it is that he is doing on this earth.

So this summer we are taking a little time to pause and consider these invitations from God.

-Because perhaps God is doing the same thing in our day with us.

-Perhaps He is extending invitations to us.

-So what do they sound like? What kinds of invitations are they that God is apt to make to people like us?

So far we have looked at God's invitation to "repent and be baptized," and his invitation, "Come, follow me."

Listen now as I read the text of Jesus healing a man who had been an invalid for 38 years, and hear another invitation from God....to him....and perhaps to us.

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Today's invitation from God, comes from Jesus in the form of a question to a broken man: "Do you want to get well?"

And it's an invitation to healing and wholeness.

-It is another of the most basic invitations that God offers to human beings in every age.

It's explicitly stated here to this crippled man by the Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem: Do you want to get well?

But if you think about it, that's the implicit invitation God gives everyone of us when He makes himself known to us, and invites us to follow him.

"Do YOU want to get well?" he asks us.

"Do YOU want me to make you whole?"

And he is not just talking about healing some physical ailment we may have.

-He's talking about mending our essential brokenness.

This is what the whole Bible is about!

-It's about God setting about to heal and redeem the essential brokenness of His creation, including us!

And as we have seen all this past year,

whenever and wherever God makes himself known to people,

-in the Old Testament and New Testament,

-in your life and mine,

-He is always both inviting people to follow him and join Him in what he is doing to redeem the world at large,

-and also inviting people to join Him in what He wants to do to redeem them personally.

You see, the Bible is not only the story of how God redeems the world in general,

-but also the story of how God heals and redeems Sarah and Abraham in particular.

-And Moses and Miriam and Aaron.

-And David and Bathsheba.

-And Peter, Andrew, James, John, Mary Magdala, Joanna, Martha, Lazarus, and Mary.

So when God comes to each of them and asks them to follow him,

-implicit in the invitation is this same question: Do you want to get well? Do you want your brokenness mended?

-Will you follow me into a life of wholeness?

It's the invitation of God to every person in every generation:

-Do you want to get well?

And you might think that the answer would be obvious:

- of course people all want to get well.
- But I am afraid the response to this invitation of God is not always obvious or immediate at all.

Take this crippled man at the Pool of Bethesda for instance.

- He doesn't immediately respond to Jesus' invitation with an enthusiastic "yes!"
- No, he actually goes into a little litany of all the reasons why "getting well" has never really worked out for him.

He says, "You see, I'm just sort of stuck here in this situation.

- I don't have anybody to help me get into the pool when the water is rippled,
- and I'm too slow to get in there by myself fast enough,
- so someone else always beats me to it.
- My family's been dropping me off at this pool every day for years, but the healing thing has never worked for me."

And doesn't that sound just like us quite often?

- We don't really believe healing is possible.
- Not for our physical infirmities, and not for the deeper brokenness of our souls either.

We feel stuck in ourselves.

- We feel stuck with the hand we have been dealt.
- We can't seem to get past our sin and selfishness.
- We can't seem to let go of our anxious thoughts.
- We feel overwhelmed and understaffed much of the time.

So when Jesus offers us an invitation to healing,

- like the man in this story, we say, "I don't think that's even possible."

And from a human perspective we are right.

- We can't heal ourselves.
- And "Pools of Bethesda" kinds of miracle cures are usually a sham.
- And modern medications may help our symptoms, but don't often get rid of our essential problems.

God's invitation to healing doesn't always elicit a resounding "yes" from us, because we are skeptical.

-And often, we are also afraid.

I mean, think again about this man at the Pool of Bethesda.

-Can you imagine what it would actually mean for him to be "made well" after 38 years of living as an invalid.

If he were healed now, he would be faced with an entirely different life than the one he has become accustomed to.

-He might have to look for a job to support himself.

-And after 38 years he might have no skills for employment.

-He might no longer find the sympathy and compassion and attention of others that his condition has brought him.

-He might be thrust into the world around him in such a whole new way at a late age in life,

-that he won't actually know what to do with himself.

There may be parts of being an invalid that he has grown to love as a part of who he is.

-Being a "broken man" may have become a part of his core identity. It's who he sees himself to be.

-He may not want to change.

Because change is hard to cope with, isn't it?

-How many of you love change in your lives?

-Most of us like the little comfort zones we create for ourselves.

-And how many times in our lives we have been given an opportunity for change,

-and we have said, "No, thank you" because we are afraid of what it will involve.

We would rather hold on to the life we know, limited though it may be,

-than to face the changes that a "healed, and whole, and set free kind of life" might entail.

But Jesus asks, "Do you want to get well?"

-And then Jesus does this other crazy thing:

-With the man at the Pool of Bethesda, in spite of the man's skepticism, doubts, and fears,

-Jesus gives him a command: Get up! Pick up your mat, and walk.”

Now this is crazy because for the last 38 years that is precisely what this crippled man could not do.

-He can't get himself up; he can't pick up his mat; he can't walk.

But surprisingly, in response to the authority he hears in Jesus' command,

-this man attempts to do obey.

-And it says that as he does, he is cured.

-He is empowered to get up, pick up his mat, and walk.

The healing comes from Jesus, by his authority and command,

-but what I don't want us to miss is that the man was commanded to participate in his own healing.

The healing was not something that was simply done to him,

-he was invited, and in this case commanded, to participate in the healing.

-His response to the invitation was a necessary part of receiving what the invitation offered.

And this is the case with all of God's invitations.

-When God calls people to Himself, our response is a necessary part of the process.

And when it comes to this particular invitation from God, “Do you want to get well?”

-we are all invited not just to be healed, but to participate in our healing.

Or I might say, we are called to “cooperate” with our healing.

-Because we are not “doing the healing ourselves,”

-but we want to be cooperating with God in the process, and not blocking it, or being stubborn, or getting in the way of the process.

Later in this story Jesus runs into this man he had healed again.

-And Jesus says to him, "See, you are well again. Now stop sinning or something worse may happen to you."

And that seems like a rather harsh thing for Jesus to say to this guy who's just learning to live as a healed man.

-But I don't think Jesus is scolding the man,  
-so much as warning him about the consequences of NOT cooperating with the on-going redeeming work that God wanted to continue doing in his life.

You see that invitation to get up and walk was probably just the first in a series of invitations this man would receive from God.

The healing of his physical body was only the beginning.

-Now the man was to "stop sinning" and become obedient to God's commands as the work began on his soul,  
-and on his character, and on the renovation of his heart.

And isn't that how it works in your life and mine?

-God doesn't just do one work of healing, or one work of salvation in our lives.  
-It's an on-going process with which we are called to cooperate.

Everyday Jesus is asking me, "Paul, do you want to get well?"

-And then everyday he invites me to pay attention to the nudges of His Spirit:

-That nudge that says, "Paul, be careful of harboring that resentment. You need to forgive and let it go, or it will fester."

-That nudge that says, "Paul, think again before you take on one more responsibility without first talking to me, and to Nancy, and to the Deacons about it.

-You have a tendency to over extend and take on so many things that you're not doing any of them very well."

-That nudge that says, "Paul, come apart with me and rest for a while. Put the "To Do List" down, and be still for a bit."

You see, those nudges are all invitations for me to cooperate with God's on-going healing work in my life.

-Jesus is tapping on my head and saying, "Paul, do you want to get well?"

"Then listen to me, follow my direction, work with me, cooperate with me."

Some days I am quick to respond and cooperate,  
-and some days not so much.

-Some days I am stuck next to my own "Pool of Bethesda,"  
-and making excuses about why the transformations God wants to make in my life just won't work.

But thankfully, Jesus didn't give up on the man in John 5,  
-and in all these years he hasn't given up on me either.

So how about you?

-Do YOU want to get well?

-Will you cooperate with God in the redeeming work that He wants to continue doing in your life?

As we come to the communion table today,  
-let's all take a minute to quietly respond to His invitation to us.

He invites us to the table,

-where we will be reminded again of the redeeming work of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of our sins.

-But even as we come to eat of the bread of life, and to drink of the cup of salvation,

-he asks us, "Do you want to get well?"

"Work with me. Cooperate with me. Walk with me."

Take a moment now to let that invitation sink from your ears into your mind and heart, and then respond.

Let us pray.