

May 9, 2010  
Echo Hill Presbyterian Church

John 5:1-9

What are we waiting for?

I know that it has been ‘forever’ since we celebrated Easter. What was it? April the 4<sup>th</sup> – when we gathered to greet the morning’s dawn, to shout “He is risen!” “He is risen indeed!” – to sing the songs – the hymns of Easter – and to proclaim to the world that in Christ’s resurrection we see God’s power to bring life out of the midst of death – life that is eternal – but also life that is for today and tomorrow?

In this season of Easter – with life exploding all around us (we’re cutting our grass, we’re planting our flowers and our gardens, the farmers are in the fields, the robins are sitting on their nest, the carp are spawning in the rivers) – in this season of Easter – we continue to make the proclamation that in Jesus’ resurrection we experience the life giving power of God. And we continue to be reminded that this life is not just the ‘eternal’ but it is life for today as well.

In our scripture reading we hear Jesus ask the question to the man who has been ‘ill’ for 38 years, “Do you want to be made well?” This is the question for us this morning – for us individually – and for us as a community of faith. For Easter invites us to experience the power of God to bring life to us now – for today and tomorrow. Easter invites us to no longer be defined by our infirmity – our inability – or our circumstance instead we are set free to live in response to the life that we have been given in Jesus Christ.

**Read Scripture.**

He has been ill for 38 years – and now his life revolves around hanging out with a group of invalids, the blind – the lame – the paralyzed. Or as The King James says it “...*a great multitude of impotent folk, of blind, halt, and withered...*”

They are hanging out by pool of water – a reservoir that provides water to the city of Jerusalem. It is a place that is called Beth-zatha – which in the Hebrew means something like – ‘*house of mercy*’ – or ‘*house of grace*’. Which is a good thing to be called if you are waiting at a place to be made well.

The way the story goes – if we read what has been omitted from our New Revised Standard Version because it doesn’t seem to be a part of the original story but seems to be added on to at later date. (You know how that goes – you come back from a fishing trip and you caught two nice walleye. Later someone ask you about your fishing trip – and you tell them about the two walleye that you caught that were whoppers and then add – you should have seen the one that got away.)

This missing part of the story does more than make our story a little more interesting. It also helps to explain the man’s response to Jesus’ question, “*Do you want to be made well?*”

But let me come back to that in a moment – this extra part of the story goes something like this: There is this multitude of ‘*impotent folk*’ waiting at the ‘*house of mercy*’ for an ‘*angel of the Lord to come down and stir the waters*’. When the waters were stirred whoever stepped in first – that person was made well. Which would be a great act of God’s mercy or grace – at least for

that person who was made well – for the one who was the fastest – or the most fortunate – or had family and friends close by that were willing to throw their sick friend into the water at a moment’s notice. ☺

But the man who has been ill for 38 years – doesn’t seem to be quick, or lucky, nor does he have anyone “*to put him into the pool when the water is stirred up...*” –

And this is what the man tells Jesus when Jesus asks him ‘*If he wants to be made well?*’

Which really isn’t an answer to the question – as much as it is an excuse – a reason for the man to stay exactly as he is ‘ill’ and stay exactly at the place he finds himself – ‘*the house of mercy with the multitude of impotent folks.*’

And isn’t this how it is for us sometime – we get to this place – where our ailment, our inability, and our circumstance begin to define us more than the goodness of our God given life.

– This is not to say that we won’t have illness or chronic ailments

– It is not to say that we will never be able to do some things – like pilot an airplane – or perform open heart surgery – or write a novel – or drive a nail – or sow a straight hem – or ski the mountains of Colorado.

– And it’s not to say that certain circumstances will not impact our lives for a season.

Like when spring rains bring historic flooding to cities along the Cedar and the Iowa Rivers.

It is to say – that sometimes we allow these things to define us – and in doing so we lose sight of the goodness of the life that we are called to in Jesus Christ. Jesus says about his sheep, ‘*I have come so that they might have life and have it abundantly.*’

I wonder this morning – if this is where we find ourselves – in this place of saying this is all I can be – this is all that I can do – this is all.....there is nothing left.

– Are we in this place of simply waiting around for the promise of the eternal life – the heavenly home – another time – when all things will be finally set right – there will be peace, kindness, generosity, faith and hope for all?

Is it true for us as a church – have we become defined by our customs – the way we do church – the way we worship – the way we do Christian Education – the way we do Mission – the way we understand ourselves as community?

Is this all...

Or does Jesus come to us this morning challenging those things that seek to define us.

Is he saying to us as individuals and as a community of faith – ‘*Do you want to be made well?*’  
‘I have the power over life and death – and I am not just speaking about physical death – but life for today and life for tomorrow – life that is lived with meaning and purpose – meaning and purpose that is always bigger than yourselves.’

*Do you want to be made well?*

Professor Ron Hansen of Santa Clara University in commenting on this passage suggests the response of the man who has been ill for 38 years to Jesus' question '*Do you want to be made well?*' 'might be characterized as a whine of self-pity.' --

'I have tried to be healed but nobody will help me.'

Are we whining about our circumstances, our inability, our ailments ...If only my husband – my wife – my children – my friends - my health – if only I could ...

As a community of faith are we stuck in the past and the present?

– We never did it this way before – if only we could pay down the loan – if only we had more people – if only the culture around us was more Godly. If only the pastor would – the session could – the worship was.

What are we waiting for? The Lord of life – the one who has power over life and death comes to us today and says to us today '*Do you want to be made well!*'

There is a family friend that we have in St Louis – Patty. Patty has Multiple Sclerosis – MS. Her MS is active and in advance form which leaves her confined to a wheel chair and severally challenged by even the most basic tasks. But if you were to ask me about Patty – I would tell you about her MS but that's not what defines her. It is her generosity toward others. She is always patient with us when we are trying to understand what she is saying. She is quick to

laugh and to laugh at herself. She is a person of deep faith. She attends Mass on Saturday evenings every time she can.

*“Do you want to be made well?”* Jesus asks.

In a quote often attributed to Nelson Mandela but actually from writer Marianne Williamson – Marianne writes

“Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's not just in some of us, it's in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

And Jesus – the Lord of life – the one who has come to bring us back to a life today that is good and beautiful – he says,

*‘Take up your mat and walk!’*

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. – Amen.