

February 9, 2014,  
John 4:46-54; 5:1-18 - *Healing Stories*

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Two healing stories today. In the first, a royal official comes to Jesus to beg for healing for his son. In the Gospel of Mark this bring your need to God would be called faith. But John's Gospel never uses the noun "faith." Instead it's always a verb, always something active. This royal official's act of believing is that when Jesus says to him, "Go; your son will live," he goes; he does what Jesus says; he trusts. I'll come back to that.

The circumstances of the second story are really different. It's a healing story, but the person who is healed is a man of no position and apparently no friends. At least no friends to help him into the waters at the appropriate time. The pool of Beth-zatha was thought to have healing powers, especially when the waters were stirred up, moving—and thus became living water. So people from all over Jerusalem would gather there seeking some measure of healing. Today's second healing story concerns a man who is unable to walk and who has been coming to the pool of Beth-zatha for *38 years*.

You'd a thunk that by now he would have given up. Maybe he had given up and just came to the pool out of habit. Unlike the royal official, this guy does not approach Jesus; Jesus comes to him. What happens next caught my attention, wrapped itself around my brain, and won't let go. Jesus comes up to this guy, and he asks him, "Do you want to be healed?"

This is not what I was expecting. Why would Jesus ask *that* question? "Do you want to be healed?" Duh! Isn't that what people come here for? Isn't the answer obvious?

Maybe not. Maybe "Do you want to be healed?" is the key question. The answer is not automatically "yes." Some people don't want to be healed. Why would anyone not want to be healed? Maybe it's because healing requires change. And people who are hurting badly are sometimes so fragile that they are afraid of any change at all. It's not that they really want to remain in the state they are in, it's just that if you're in such a fragile state, it's really hard to do the work that change requires because as bad as things are now, you fear any change might make things worse. It's kind of a better the devil you know than the devil you don't.

Have you ever been there? Are you there now? When we get there Jesus says to us, "Do you want to be healed? Do you trust that if you venture out in faith God will bring about something good?" Ultimately this is a faith question isn't it? When we don't want to be healed, we are not yet ready to trust that if we venture out in faith God will bring about something better.

I don't mean to say that in accusing way. For one thing, most of us find ourselves in that position sooner or later. For another, if you are deeply hurting sticking with what you know rather than venturing out into the unknown seems reasonable. Well, maybe not *reasonable*, for that is not a reasoned decision but an emotional one. But it's certainly understandable. Being made well means moving from one lifestyle to another. And even under the best of circumstances, that can be a scary prospect.

In John, faith is always a verb, always an action. Not a feeling, not a set of propositions you accept, but action, something we do. It may be as simple as walking back home when Jesus says, "Go; your son will live." Or it might be as frightening as doing something you haven't been able to do for 38 years, taking up your mat and walking. But it is always something we do.

To put the Gospels of Mark and John together, faith is bringing our need to God, asking for healing, and then doing what God asks. What faith, what action is God calling you to do?