

Sometimes, we hear the stories from the bible and think, “Oh, Jesus did a nice thing,” and then a few seconds later something finally strikes a synapses and we go, “huh?” So it is today. Jesus made a handicapped man walk. “Oh good.” The man had laid in a doorway bay a pool for 38 years. “Huh?” 38 years?

Now, sometimes it also happens that different translations of the bible have different words. This could be because of translating specific Greek words differently. It also can happen because different ancient sources were used. That’s the case here. The foot notes to the New Revised Standard Bible, “Other ancient authorities add, wholly or in part, that [invalids were] waiting for the stirring of the water; for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred up the water; whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had.”

OK, that helps a little. Our friend had waited for 38 years for someone to come along and carry him to the water when the water was stirred up. After so many years, he never go to the water in time.

When Jesus came along, he asked the man if he wanted to be healed. Seems a little obvious to me. Paralyzed. Unable to get tot eh water. You’d think the answer would be obvious. But you notice, the man never answers Jesus directly. He starts in with his story of how no one would help him. Other people got there first. He had to wait until the water was stirred up and he just couldn’t do it.

I think Jesus was right in asking that question. His behavior sure didn’t indicate a strong desire to be healed. Now, I’m not saying that he was faking his infirmity. And I certainly don’t want to imply that disabilities are a persons choice. But come on. If he really believed the water

would cure him, don't you think that after 38 years he might have decided to wait closer to the pool? There was something else going on there.

I'm sure we all know people who seem to enjoy being miserable. Problems are someone else's fault. I had a friend who I accused of never spilling his water because he had never seen a glass that was half full. It was always half empty.

Our associate pastor, Jackie, says that some people wouldn't be happy if you hung them with a new rope.

We know them. In fact, sometimes, we are them. Skepticism can be a good thing. But so is creativity and passion. We've never done it that way. That's not something our people want. Those people just want to change our church. If we can't convince them with our logic, let's hit them with guilt.

That's what our Gospel friend was doing. I can't. They won't. Feel bad for me.

Most of you know that I ran a homeless shelter before I came here, so I understand about poverty and hopelessness. But there is a sub group of the poor that I just don't tolerate. These are the guilt salesmen that stand on the corner with a sign that says, "will work for food" or any other guilt inspiring slogans. They're probably really poor, maybe hungry and probably homeless. But to sit on a street corner for 38 years waiting for an angel to stir the water so that you can be instantly cured just doesn't work.

But here's an interesting part. We all know the two most popular biblical quotes, "God helps those who help themselves" and, "charity begins at home". The problem is, neither of them are in the bible. The first is from Ben Franklin and the second is an old Scottish proverb.

And they certainly didn't apply to Jesus. Because in spite of his stubbornness, his victim mentality, and his poor pitiful me outlook on life, Jesus healed him.

What's up with that. I've had a bad leg for 25 years. I go to church. Heck, I'm the pastor of one. I pray. I take meds. I know I should exercise. And this lay about gets healed while I still have good days and bad.

See, that's one of the difficult things about life, and I think particularly for people of faith. Life isn't fair. I've buried too many people who were killed in a traffic accident where a drunk driver killed them, but walked away with little or no injuries. It's not fair.

Why do kids get cancer? Why do good people get robbed or killed? Why do the poor suffer while the rich get fat. It's not fair.

Did Jesus heal this guy because he deserved it? No. Did Jesus die on the cross for our sins because we deserved it? Do we have the promise of eternal life because we deserve it. No. Jesus grace isn't fair, in our definition, because nothing we do can make us deserve God's grace.

Jesus didn't heal people because he was a nice guy, although I'm sure he was. Jesus had a mission to fulfill. He preached a message that said that the old reality had passed away, and the reign of God had begun. A reign where there is no distinction between people. A kingdom of peace, unity and self giving love.

Jesus told this man to get up and walk to show that no one is exempt from the promise of eternal life and wholeness. And even more disturbing, he did this on the Sabbath. The poor paralytic got arrested for carrying his bed home on the Sabbath. Jesus' message is that God wants us to be whole, to be restored to the perfect God image in which we were created. And

God doesn't care when one is healed. God doesn't care where one is healed. And he doesn't care why one needed to be healed.

God reigns, and in God's kingdom, everyone deserves a chance.

That's a good thing. If it was up to me, I'd want to put limits on it. Oh come on God, not him. He's a jerk. God answers, "and your point, Jerk?"

I don't know why God hasn't wiped out disease or pain. I know that God's working on it. Kari and I went to get our shots for going to Africa, which has been postponed again. We got shots for everything, except small pox. It's not a health issue any more. It took a lot of work and the genius of a couple of extraordinary scientists, but God has worked the miracle of healing that one disease. He used people to do it.

Salk and Saban's work has encouraged millions of scientists to find the cure for many different things.

Jesus healing that man wasn't so much about making that one person well as it was to show the world that we can be made whole again, restored to our intended relationship with God through the simple word of Jesus. Stand up, take your mat and walk.

The Kingdom of God is here, take up your mat and walk. The old reality of sin and death has been ended. Take up your mat and walk. Eternal life awaits all who love Jesus. Take up your mat and walk. Heaven isn't just for the rich and important. Take up your mat and walk.

We can sit around waiting for someone to carry us to the disturbed waters. We can drown in the tears of our own self pity. We can look at the world as its victims. We can complain about the unfairness of life.

Or, we can hear the words of Jesus, take your mat and walk.