

“Time to Walk”

When one reads the story of John’s account of the ill man at the side of the pool at Bethesda, two things are amazing. First, there is the man’s time spent, time wasted by the healing pool. Second, there is the beauty of Jesus’ timing. As a sick person with limited mobility, the man must have counted the days and years that went by with no change in his situation. Thirty-eight years is a long time to be stuck in one position. Keep in mind that the average life expectancy at the time of Christ was twenty-five years.

I wonder about the amount of time that went by as he imagined whom he could count on and how his life would be different if he could just get to those healing waters. Day after day, week after week, year after year, his thoughts of a calculated move towards healing were always interrupted. Imagine people getting in his way of getting close to those healing waters. The timing had to be right, when the waters were stirred up. I can imagine his just giving up. I can imagine him feeling like time was just evaporating as he remained stagnant and stuck in that position.

For this man, time must have been a torture, a mockery. With each new day and each new hour, he was reminded that nothing good was going to happen to him. He was reminded that no one had stepped in to help him out.

This man's story makes me think that one needs to know when to make the right move at the right time. As you know, I love sports---many different kind of sports. One of my favorite sports is baseball. I remember coming home from school in the fall of 1970 and watching the World Series between the Baltimore Orioles and the Cincinnati Reds. This was when the series was played during the day. The Reds were known as the Big Red Machine and their hitting with Johnny Bench and Pete Rose was supposed to be unstoppable.

But the Orioles easily won the series four games to one. There were two things that were keys to their victory. First, the great defensive play of third baseman Brooks Robinson. Second, the Orioles had one of the best pitching staffs in the history of baseball. The strategy of baseball is what intrigues me, and the pitching is so important. What pitch do you throw to a hitter like Pete Rose, the greatest hitter in the history of baseball? Do you throw a fastball, a curve, or a slider?

But like the story we read today, the critical thing for the Orioles was timing. How far do you let your starting pitcher go before you bring in your closer? If you let your starting pitcher go too long, he tires and gives up runs. If you bring your closer in too soon, he may have to pitch more innings than he should. The strategy is to know when to make a change.

In our story today from John, the paralyzed man is waiting for a change.

Then Jesus comes on the scene. With the clock ticking for this immobilized man, Jesus does not focus on the amount of time the man has been sick. Jesus does not rehash everything or try to figure out who is at fault for this man's predicament. Jesus does not bemoan the fact that this man has been landlocked for 38 years. Jesus goes right to the heart of the matter, simply asking, "Do you want to be made well?"

With one question in a moment's notice, Jesus wipes away every excuse, every barrier, and every misperception this unnamed man has had concerning his own situation. Jesus, like a seasoned baseball manager who knows just the right moment to put in the closing pitcher and finish the game, seizes the opportunity. It is a miracle that the man is able to take up his mat and walk after being incapacitated for 38 frustrating years. It is also a miracle that Jesus invites him to see the impossible and to participate in his own healing and renewal.

As the story comes to a close, we get one more take on the perfect timing of Jesus. The healing takes place on the Sabbath, a time when Jesus often gets in trouble for healing, feeding, and caring for others. While others may be fixated on the clock, Jesus is fixated on the moment. He is opening the hearts and minds of those around him. He reminds them that even on a day of rest, God's

transformative power is always at work. God's redemptive power is always ready to spring forth. It's a sacred moment that cannot be calculated but can be cultivated.

What does this story of healing mean for you today? Have you been waiting for the right moment to jump into the healing water but through excuses or barriers you have not made that final decision? These barriers might be from others but might be your own, set up by you because you are fearful or hesitant. Have you put off that decision to let Jesus be part of your life? Even if you made a commitment of faith at some point in your life to Christ, have you failed to seize the moment to be well? Have you been scared to answer Jesus' call to whatever he wants you to do?

Only the divine can cultivate a *Kairos* moment in our lives. *Kairos* is a Greek word which means critical or opportune moment. The Holy Spirit guides us in these critical moments. This is what Jesus did for the man who was afflicted for 38 years, and it's what Jesus does for us time and time again. The invitation to the sick man to desire healing and restoration is a timeless invitation. Christ is among us, ready to seize the moment to ask if we desire to be well. This is God's hope: for us to made whole, to be reconciled with our creator, and to be reconciled to one another.

It doesn't matter how much time has passed, and it doesn't matter if the barriers we see are real or perceived. Christ will find just the right moment to speak to us---in the voice of another person or through a song, a gentle breeze, scripture, art, or something that challenges the mind and convicts the soul. Christ has the power and precision to know when to remind us of the invitation to want to be made well. Each time we answer yes to the grand invitation to wholeness, we are commanded to delay no longer but to get up and walk in a way that is renewed with each new day. Are you ready to take up your mat and walk with Jesus?