

Rise and Walk!

John 5:1-15

At the pool of Siloam in Bethesda, nothing was supernatural about the water, until Jesus went there. It was a quiet spring which, from time to time, suddenly gushed and bubbled from far below the surface. Perhaps it had some medicinal value, like the popular hot springs of today. In any case, from all appearances, it owed its fame primarily to the healing power of expectation.

Over time, legend attributed miraculous healing to the gushing, bubbling water as the sick and afflicted bathed in it. The porches were never empty. It is not unusual to find sick and helpless people gathering together — yes, the sick and helpless have also gathered in our churches throughout history. They do not all profess to have found health, but they want to believe they have been within the reach of healing at all times, if it should be offered.

What these searching seekers require is to be brought face to face with Jesus Christ — the One Who causes each encounter with Him to be supernatural — He speaks to the sick, the hurting, and the discouraged, “Do you want to be healed?” And then, according to their faith and response, speaks again with power and authority, “Rise and walk!”

The problems people suffer are not all the same, but in one form or another most people discover that the world is a place of great trouble, and a smiling face often masks a very sad and anxious heart.

Often, a crushing sense of sin and failure, slips or stumbling, hurt and pain, deep loss or defeat — bring us eagerly to the foot of the cross of Christ for help, eagerly seeking healing and strength to go on in life.

We sense the eyes of others upon us and too often we follow the confession of Adam, “I went and hid myself” — for we cannot afford to face having our secrets of life laid bare.

The immediate significance of this Gospel story is Jesus’ sovereign power over illness. A secondary significance is the connection between physical illness and sin. We are not told clearly that this man was ill because he had sinned, but Jesus says that he has and that, if he sins again, a more terrible consequence will follow.

We can indeed be thankful that God, in His great mercy, does not always allow our repeated sins to have such distressing repercussions in our bodies!

Christ’s question, “Are you willing to be made whole?” places the responsibility upon each of us — demanding a response. Too often, our response is, “Not now, a little later, I’ll attend to this another time.” The Gospel of comforting hope is not needed in such circumstances, but the Gospel of stir and challenge. Christ comes into the porches by the quiet waters of waiting with this stirring challenge, “Do you want to be healed?” And everything begins or ends with our response to His question.

If we are ready to rise at His call, He tells us to take up the bed of limitation on which we have lain for so long, and to walk. The very movement of resolve brings with it the Divine power to achieve.

It is not that power and healing are given to some and withheld from others. It is that one grasps the occasion, while another waits for it. One rises up and another dreams on. One says to himself, “Next time!” and another says, “NOW!”

That little word “NOW” is the simple gateway into the Kingdom of God, that Kingdom which today, as so often before, is taken by the violence of action. Violence in this manner is not bad ... it is good — it’s positive. Remember — there was a violent earthquake, as the Angel of the Lord rolled away the stone from the grave of Christ.

What meets us today in the Gospel is not a novelty of teaching, but an unexpected demand for action ... a closer walk with God ... a newness of living ... that is what Christ gives, a clean heart, a heart which hopes and which receives. Hear Christ’s words spoken fresh to you today, “Rise and walk!”

If you want to live a Christian life? Do not delay your purpose: do not think that you can find an easier way, one with less pain ... for this may well be a fatal mistake. Rather, reach out in faith today, take hold of the Master’s hand. Don’t wait for a more convenient time, for it may never come! The Scriptures instruct us, “Now is the acceptable time, today is the day of Salvation!” Do it now! “Rise and walk!”

Glory to Jesus Christ!