

John 5:1-9

“Do you want to be healed?”

The gospel of John gives us a narration of Jesus healing of the ill man at the Sheep Gate or precisely at the Pool of Bethesda. According to the Book of Nehemiah 7:1, the Sheep Gate was located near the temple, and it was surrounded by five porches, providing shelter for spectators or onlookers. So, people would come to the pool of Bethesda for different reasons: some would come very early to occupy the front seats so that they could clearly see the drama that would happen when the water was stirred; some would come to be healed, others would come to benefit from the alms extended to those who were crippled. I want to believe that people come to Church for varied reasons too, I don't want to go there!

John does not tell us the nature of the man's illness but only that the man was ill for 38 years. Jesus started ministry at +/-30years and ended at +/-33years implying that this man has been ill before even Jesus was born. Some of you have been at the pool of St Peter's even before I was born and I pray that you behave like the Macedonians in Acts 16: 9ff, they cried with a loud voice, **“Paul, come over Macedonia and help us!”** Success relies on the attitude of the one to be helped.

I strongly believe that I am in this parish to help someone, not everyone of course because there were many at the pool of Bethesda, but Jesus helped only one man. At the same time, I believe in the priesthood of all believers, reciprocal ministry so I am in the parish to be helped by someone, of course not all of you will be of help but someone.

Chances are high that this man at Bethesda did not know Jesus especially considering that he did not ask to be healed but Jesus extended the invitation to him, **“Do you want to be healed?”** What is interesting in this story is that the healing formula was well known, they waited for the water to be stirred then the 1st one to enter the pool was the only one to be healed. Now Jesus, is coming with a totally new formula, **“Rise take your mat and walk!”**. If you were the ill man, how were you going to react to this stranger's instruction? **“Rise take your mate and walk!”**. No matter that the news was good, but the formula was unorthodox hence might not have been accepted by a lot of us. In 2

Kings 5:1-19, we read the story of Naaman. He visited Elisha hoping that the prophet would lay his hands on him to receive healing, but Elisha used an unorthodox formula, **“Go and wash yourself seven times in river Jordan”** Naaman was very upset because for him there were better rivers in Damascus (Abana and Pharpar). Sometimes the idea is not about what we are used to do but about what God wants us to do. Some people are reluctant to leave the familiar and explore possibilities for better life. This is one of the reasons why Jesus had to ask the ill man, **“Do you want to be healed?”** Change relies more on the one in the situation, otherwise if you try to impose, they will simply sabotage your efforts. So, Jesus had to make sure, **“Do you want to be healed?”**

The other reason why Jesus had to ask that seemingly silly question was to attract the crowds' attention. Every hearing Jesus asking that question while the water was still then waited anxiously to see what Jesus would do now that the man had responded and said, yes. This narration fits well in the model of Jesus' healing miracle i.e., Description of the malady, The panacea, and the reaction of the onlookers. But why were the onlookers important? Miracles contributed significantly to achieved honour and in healing this man Jesus was indirectly challenging the Jewish religious leaders. This man had been lying for 38 years at the gate of the temple and the Jewish Religious leaders failing to provide a solution. So, in this instance, Jesus is doing that which the Jewish religious leaders failed to do for 38 years. The underlining values that govern the Greco-Roman world were the values of Honor and Shame. Now, the game of Honour and Shame was played in public space and the onlookers/crowd/public were the amperes. So, with this would then explain why possibly Jesus had to ask the ill man, **“Do you want to be healed?”**. So, Jesus was attracting the referee's attention before taking a penalty.

In his response, the ill man did two things: he did not answer the question but gave an explanation; secondly, he did not take responsibility for his circumstances. But because the ampere was already waiting to give a verdict, Jesus did not allow the man's failure to answer the question to put him off, but he proceeded to perform the miracle, **“Take your mat and walk”**. God has a unique way of dealing with our situations but sometimes we are not prepared to leave our comfort zones. Let us allow God to work in our lives. Amen.