

MEDITATION

Reader 4: Our gospel reading tells of an encounter Jesus had while in Jerusalem during one of the Jewish festivals. The setting of the story is a pool near one of the city gates. People who were ill or disabled went there for healing. They believed that every so often, the pool was stirred by an angel, and the first person into the stirred water would be healed.

Bible Reading: John 5:2 – 9a

Good News version

Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches; in Hebrew it is called Bethesda. A large crowd of people were lying on the porches – those who were blind, lame, paralysed, and sick. A certain man there had been sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that the man had been sick for such a long time; so he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

The sick man answered, “Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first.”

Jesus said to him, “Get up, pick up your mat, and walk.”

Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking.

Reader 4: The man Jesus met was unable to get into the stirred water by himself, so he could not see how he would be healed. So, he had been waiting on his mat for a very long time, apparently missing every opportunity. What does this encounter with Jesus suggest about the man? He seem a lone person; he had nobody to help him get healed. He sounded stagnant and powerless. Maybe that was what led Jesus to ask him a life-changing question: ‘Do you want to get well?’

Reader 5: What does this encounter say about Jesus? Jesus acted with compassion, love, understanding and caring. Jesus, in his humanity, could identify himself with human suffering. Jesus in his humility could listen to the man without judging his excuses. Jesus gave the man a chance.

Reader 6: What does this encounter tell us about God? Jesus' response challenges the man, who had been sick for 38 years, to do three things: get up, pick up his mat, and walk. The dialogue between Jesus and that man takes us beyond the physical healing. The active verbs suggest that we should not be afraid to act on the word of God. God is offering us the steps for personal and social transformation.

Reader 4: How do we view the story through Jesus' eyes? The miracle and transformation in the story are symbolised by the mat. The mat was the place the man laid down with his excuses, even though he was searching for healing. After the encounter with Jesus, the mat became a reminder of this healing.

Reader 5: Jesus empowers us to be made well by *doing* something to release the transformation that God is offering – to rise and take up our mat, whatever that may be for us, and walk. Jesus empowers us to choose to be healed, to be made whole, perhaps physically, mentally, spiritually or socially. When we are made whole, we are reconciled to God, to ourselves, and to our community. When we are reconciled, we can truly love, and when we truly love, we are able to walk toward peace. So, 'Rise! Take your mat and walk.'

Reader 6: Reflect on the following questions with the person next to you:

1. What is the context that you or your community lives in, that needs to hear Jesus' life-changing question – "Do you want to get well?"
2. What are the obstacles or excuses that are not allowing for transformation?
3. What does, 'Rise! Take your mat and walk' mean in your context?