**GET UP! PICK UP YOUR MAT AND WALK**

November 6, 2016

John 5:1-15

Key Verse 5:8 “Then Jesus said to him, ‘Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.’”

Have you ever been sick? People have struggled with illnesses throughout history. In the past the average lifespan was less than 40 years. So when they were sick, they would go to a temple for god’s mercy. In Rome, there were many temples for Asclepius, god of medicine. You see the “star of life” in the World Health Organization or on the side of an ambulance. It is a symbol of a snake wrapping around a stick. It represents rod of Asclepius. Many people suffer from illnesses and disabilities in this life, and many die without being healed. It is not because Jesus has no power to heal. In today’s passage Jesus healed only one man, the man who had been invalid for 38 years, and no one else, even though they were waiting desperately for healing. Jesus said to the man, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” In other words, Jesus said, “I have healed your body with the aim that it would lead to the healing of your soul. Do not miss the purpose of your healing. Otherwise you may be condemned to eternal punishment.” So until Jesus comes again, we groan in our weakness so that we may meet him in our brokenness and receive the power of his forgiveness and have eternal life. Today Jesus wants us to hear his voice, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk,” so that we may be healed in our soul and have life in Jesus.

Jesus went up to Jerusalem for a feast of the Jews. One day while he was there, he walked by a pool named Bethesda, located near the Sheep Gate. “Bethesda” means “house of mercy” in Aramaic. A great number of disabled people—blind, lame, paralyzed—were lying around the pool. They were waiting for the moving of the waters. They believed that the one who got into the pool first when the water was stirred would be healed of whatever disease he had. This was especially good news for those who have terminal illness. So this news spread all over Israel, and many came to be healed. Today many suffer from terminal illnesses, and they would do anything to get better. 6 million people go to Lourdes, France, every year for healing because they heard that the water from the small spring has healing power since Mary appeared to a peasant girl named Bernadette and told her to dig in the ground and drink from the small spring of water.

At the pool of Bethesda the people were lying there waiting for the time when the water was stirred up, wishing to get into the pool first. Each person was nervous and restless to get into the pool “first” and be healed. No one wanted to be pushed aside. They were very competitive and were extremely selfish. Each of them wished that the best fortune would come upon him, not upon others. They were also all crippled people. Each one had his own infirmity and discomfort and handicap. Each one had his own kind of bitterness and sorrow. They were very fatalistic and miserable. One of them may have thought, “I am the most unlucky person since the world was made.” Another may have thought, “I am the most miserable person who has ever lived.” Even though they were very competitive, they helped each other out of their humanistic sympathy and empathy. Perhaps the blind man carried the lame man piggy-back to the edge of the pool. It was good for them to do so. But when they had to decide who would go into the pool first, there was a dilemma: “Who will go into the pool first, you or I?” Only the first one was healed. You have dream to be healed, but the realization of the dream was too difficult.

If that is God’s grace, then God’s grace is very stingy. This grace should be obtained through great effort. They have to wait for uncertain future. If God’s grace is like this, those who receive this grace are miserable. Bethesda shows symbolically Jewish view of grace. Clearly they ask for God’s grace. But they thought that only a few would receive God’s grace. They thought that in order to receive God’s grace, they need to keep the laws and work very hard. Today many Christians view God’s grace in this way. God’s grace is given from time to time, to only a few chosen people. In order to receive this grace, one needs to make great effort. What about unbelievers? They look at Bethesda of luck. You see so many advertisement for lottery; Lotto Max 60 million dollars. Many look at Bethesda of girlfriends or boyfriends. They think that if they meet dream boyfriends or girlfriends, they will be happy. Many look at Bethesda of hitting it big in business. So Bethesda represents a place where grace is rare, and in order to receive this rare grace, you have to do fierce competition. If God’s grace comes like Bethesda, how miserable our life would be!

Look at verses 5,6. “One who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, ‘Do you want to get well?’” This question tells us that Jesus is full of grace and is the God of compassion. This man had been a paralytic for 38 years. This man probably emitted an offensive odor because he could not bathe freely. His paralysis was incurable. Maybe for 5 or 6 years he might have tried to be cured of his paralysis. He might have spent all his possession on doctors. But as time passed by, hope must have died and only a passive and dull despair left behind. People who saw this man’s tragic situation did not even want to look at him, being afraid of becoming like him. Probably the townspeople who passed by him by chance pretended they had not seen him, and hurried away. But Jesus paid attention to this filthy man and asked, “Do you want to get well?” This was a divine voice to the wretched person. Jesus is full of grace (Jn 1:14). The grace of Jesus is higher than the mountains and deeper than the ocean. May God grant us his grace so that we may also help unlovable people.

“Do you want to get well?” This question to this invalid man was a difficult question to answer. But Jesus asked this question to see if this man had desire to be healed. There are many who are like this invalid man. People seem to have many desires but in reality they have no idea what they want. So many people say habitually, “I don’t know.” Jesus wanted to heal this man’s chronic problem of having no hope. The Danish philosopher Kierkeggard said, “Hopelessness is the sickness that leads to death.” People do not know why they have to struggle hard. So they just exist. They live because others live. This is a pitiful condition. In this moment, Jesus is asking us also, “Do you want to get well?” How is your life today? Do you live a powerful Christian life? Or do you feel that your life is going nowhere? Do you feel that you are in the dead end street without any way out lying in the house of mercy? It is ironical that we become helpless and dry even though we worship in the house of God. Let’s come out of our helplessness and accept Jesus’ love and grace. The desire for the better things must be surging in our hearts. The first essential toward receiving the power of Jesus is the intense desire for it. If Jesus comes to us and says, “Do you really want to be changed?” and in our hearts we are content to stay as we are, there can be no change at all. Therefore, every man must have a burning fire and master passion in his heart. Most of all, all men must have a holy desire to be right with God.

What was his answer? Look at verse 7. “‘Sir,’ the invalid replied, ‘I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.’” He should have shouted with a great joy, “Yes, Lord. I want to get well. Please help me.” But to our surprise, he did not answer Jesus’ question. Rather, he complained about other people. Here we can see two basic life problems of this man.

First, “I have no one to help.” Think about 38-years of his life. Who fed him every day and took care of him every night? He received a lot of help from others so far. But he said, “I have no one to help me.” He was a man of human dependency. His parents gave him a lot of human love and attention from his childhood because of his disabled physical condition. Maybe his parents bought all the toys he wanted to make him happy and fed him like a king all the time. But at the pool of Bethesda, there was no one to help him because each person had his or her own problem. He despaired a lot when he depended on others. His despair developed within him as a habit of complaining. When Jesus met him, he complained about other people, that they did not help him out. He is the kind of person who would complain throughout his lifetime and die in despair saying, “I have no one to help me.” Here we can see the futility of human expectation from others. Jesus is God the Incarnate who came down from heaven to help us from our sin of complaining and despair. Only Jesus can help our chronic sin problem and save us from condemnation. We have to bring all our problems to him by trusting his love and mercy. We have to depend on God all the time rather than others.

Second, “Someone else goes down ahead of me.” He was a man of defeat. He suffered a lot because of his endless defeat in trying to get into the pool first. Then he developed a loser’s mentality. This kind of attitude paralyzed him to do nothing. He felt defeated before even trying. He was in no-win situation. That’s true. He was a victim of human competition. In the world of competition there are few winners and many losers. Many great men and women became useless because of one failure or defeat. But Jesus came to restore our defeated life. Jesus came to stop this man’s losing streak even though he did not have any win record. In Jesus there are no losers but only winners. Why? Jesus won the permanent victory on the cross over Satan. Jesus crushed Satan’s head through his resurrection victory. Apostle Paul said in Romans 8:37, “No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” There will be no defeat in Jesus. We are more than conquerors when we are in Jesus. Praise Jesus who knew this man’s helpless condition and came to him by asking, “Do you want to get well?” Let’s accept Jesus’ offer with personal faith by saying, “Yes, Jesus. I want to get well. Heal my soul by your blood.”

How did Jesus help this man? Jesus did not listen to his complaining but challenged him with his word. Look at verse 8. “Get up, pick up your mat and walk!” Jesus did not allow him to dwell in his pitiful human condition any more. So he challenged him to get up and pick up his old mat of sickness and defeat and start a new life of faith with the help of God. Jesus helped him say good-bye to his old life of chronic disease and say hello to a new life of hope and joy. Jesus did not want him to remain an obscure person without any hope. Jesus wanted him to come out of his old life by listening to his command. What happened to this man? Look at verse 9a. “At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.” It was very difficult for him to accept Jesus’ word because he had been in this condition for 38 years. There were many reasons for him not to obey Jesus’ command. Probably he was afraid of losing his beggar’s job, which was his life security. He was a paralytic both physically and mentally. He might be content to remain an invalid, because if he was cured, he would have to take all the burden of making a living. As a paralytic, someone else does all the working and worrying.

But when he obeyed Jesus’ word, he was cured. He got up from his dirty mat and walked. He was healed from his chronic paralysis. He started a new life with Jesus’ help. He could run and play a ball. Jesus is full of mercy and love. He came to this world to heal the sick and give us new life. Like this invalid man, all of us have “one” dark element of life which makes us cry all of our life. Sometimes we are suffering endlessly because of our helplessness over certain problems of life. Many of us used to say, “Well, I tried to overcome my sinful desires but I am helpless. I tried to overcome my selfishness but still I am selfish.” When U of T students did not respond to our invitation to Bible study, I despaired a lot and only complained about student’s lack of spiritual desires. Instead of working hard with what I have, I was just lying there, waiting to see students’ spiritual desires improve overnight by a miracle. I must hear Jesus’ voice, “Get up, pick up your mat and walk.” We must get up from our fatalism, and work hard with what we have to live a life that pleases God.

Notice that after healing the man, Jesus quickly disappeared into the crowd. If he had stayed there after healing one man, there would have been a frenzy of miracle-seeking. That is not what Jesus wanted. Jesus seeks out the man in a less conspicuous place and tells him the real purpose in his healing. Look at verse 14. “Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.’” Jesus is saying, “My aim in healing your body is the healing of your soul. I have given you a gift. It’s free. You didn’t earn it. You weren’t good enough for it. Let the gift of healing, the gift of my free grace, be a means to your holiness.” Jesus warns him that, if he turns away, and mocks this gift, or makes an idol out of his health, and embraces sin as his way of life, he will perish in the final judgment. The implications of this are huge for the diseases and disabilities that we deal with today. Jesus walked into a huge “multitude of invalids” and heals one man, just one, and disappears before even that man can know who he was. He leaves hundreds of invalids behind unhealed. Then he told the healed man, “Stop sinning.” The point is this: In the first coming of the Son of God into the world, we receive foretastes of his healing power. The full healing of all his people and all their diseases and disabilities awaits the second coming of Christ. And the aim of these foretastes which we receive now is to call us to faith and holiness. Usually in the time of suffering, we meet God more deeply. May God help us to hear Jesus’ voice, “Do you want to get well? Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!” so that our souls may be healed, and grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ as the Son of God.