

John 5:1-15

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Bethzatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids---blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath, and so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, the law forbids you to carry your mat." But he replied, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Pick up your mat and walk.' So they asked him, "Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?" The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there. 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." The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

Gracious God,
Free my soul from worry.
Help me feel you by my side.
Shelter me from stress and worry.
Loving Savior, strength and guide.
Amen

"Sabbath Healing"

An old story tells of a rabbi living in a Russian city a century ago. Disappointed by his lack of direction and life purpose, he wandered in the chilly evening. With his hands thrust deep in his pockets, he aimlessly walked through the empty streets, questioning his faith in God, the Scriptures and his religious calling. The only thing colder than the Russian winter air was the chill within his soul. He felt so enshrouded by his own despair that he mistakenly wandered into a Russian military compound off limits to civilians. The bark of a Russian soldier shattered the silence of the evening chill. "who are you? And what are you doing here?" "Excuse me?" replied the rabbi. "I said, 'Who are you and what are you doing here?'" After a brief moment, the rabbi, in a gracious tone so as not to provoke the soldier, said, "How much do you get paid every day?" "What does that have to do with you?" the soldier retorted. With the delight of someone making a new discovery, the rabbi said, "I will pay you the equal sum if you will ask me those same two questions every day: 'Who are you?' and 'What are you doing here?'" (from 'Jesus is the Question', p. 3-4).

'The soldier in the story,' commented Martin Copenhaver, 'did not intend to ask open-ended questions, but the rabbi heard them---or chose to hear them---as open-ended. To the rabbi, they were profound questions about his identity as a person and the purpose of his life. . . Open ended questions of this kind are particularly helpful in putting us in touch with our deepest desires (Ibid, p. 4).

When Jesus saw the invalid laying on his mat by the waters of the healing pool", the open-ended question he asked the man was: "Do you want to be made well?" It was a question aimed at stirring up the man's deepest desires for healing and at clarifying his thinking about what had kept him down for thirty-eight years. Turned out, it was a discernment question that worked. "Sir," the sick man answered, "I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am making my way, someone steps down ahead of me." Stepping on others to get self needs met and not lending a helping hand to

benefit the well being of another is a sign of failed human community. So when Jesus' words, "Stand up, take your mat and walk" freed the man from the shackles of personal shame that had kept him mat bound, the disabled man became noticeably able bodied.

Jesus said to him, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk. At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

John 5:8



Now had John's gospel story ended there, the reader would never have gone deeper to discover how the man's long suffering, shame based disability was related to his identity as a Sabbath keeping Jew and to God's purpose of healing creation.

Now that day was a Sabbath so the Jews said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath, the law forbids you to carry your mat."

John 5:9

Just like we Christians who sing, 'And they'll know we are Christians by our love . . ." Jews in Jesus' time proclaimed: They will know we are Jews by our Sabbath keeping. In Exodus 20:9 the fourth of the big Ten commands: "Six days you shall work; but the seventh day is a Sabbath of rest; you shall do no work."

The command helps practicing Jews identify with their Creator God who made everything in six days and then rested on the seventh. In 'Sabbath as Resistance: Saying No to the Culture of Now', Walter Brueggemann noted: YHWH is a Sabbath-keeping God, which fact ensures that restfulness, not restlessness is at the center of life. YHWH is a Sabbath giving God and a Sabbath-commanding God. Israel, for that reason, is always again to re-choose between 'life and death' (Deut. 30:15-20), between YHWH and "the gods of your ancestors" (Josh. 24:14-15), between YHWH and Baal (1 Kgs. 18:21), between the way of Torah and the way of sinners (Ps. 1). Sabbath becomes a decisive, concrete, visible way of opting for and aligning with the God of rest (p. 10). Sounds good, but over time God's fourth command to rest had become so over coded with rules and regulations that anxiety around keeping them turned restful souls into restless ones . . .who failed at building neighborly community according to YHWH's last six Big Ten commands..

In his daily devotional, "The Badge of Busyness' Matthew Laney commented: Of all the commandments, keeping Sabbath is the most counter-intuitive. Especially now. We are increasingly uncomfortable with downtime and relaxation, reaching for our phone in unoccupied moments, wearing our busyness like a badge of honor. "I'm so busy" is both a cry of lament and a pretention to importance. Remember the Sabbath is not only a command for rest, it is an invitation to know the joy of being unnecessary. No one is more important or necessary than God and even God took a day off!

Jesus said: 'Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me: for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light (Matt. 11:28-30)..