Do You Want to Get Well?

John 5:1-15

Key Verse:5:6 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?”

We are often shocked by news about people’s senseless behaviors which have perpetrated beyond our imagination and against morality. A month ago, a couple in California were arrested with charges of child danger and torture. Their 13 malnourished children, ranging in ages from 2 to 29, were being held captive in their home, shackled by their parents. One of their children escaped and called 911 for help. When the investigators arrived at their home, some of them were chained to the bed and padlocked in a dark and dirty room. When I heard the news, I felt sick, wondering how evil and wicked human beings are. The parents were worse than wild animals. As Eric Fromm described in his book “*The Sane Society*”, people in modern days are sick and insane in one way or the other. We become anxious about the reality that people become more senseless, ruthless, heartless, and merciless as Paul mentioned in Romans 1:29-31. Because people are sick, our society is also sick, and our nation sick, too. We are concerned about next generation because the sickness deepens and widens as years go by.

In today’s passage Jesus visits an invalid man in Jerusalem and asks, “Do you want to get well?” Then Jesus heals the man. Today I ask Jesus to visit each of us and ask us with the same question, “Do you want to get well?” Let us hear Jesus’ words and learn the meaning of his question to the man and to us.

Today’s story starts with Jesus’ visit in Jerusalem, not long after he had healed a royal official’s son in Galilee. Jesus and his disciples were in Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Jewish festivals. According to Moses’ law, all Jewish males had to visit Jerusalem to celebrate three festivals, the Festival of Unleavened Bread, the Festival of Weeks, and the Festival of Tabernacles. (Ex 23:14-16, Deut 16:1-17) This Friday people in Asia celebrate the lunar festival. Regardless of differences of race, region, or culture, festivals bring joy to the people. Especially during all these Jewish festivals, the Jews remember God’s grace and care for their ancestors while they had been in Egypt and in wilderness. Contrary to the people who gathered in Jerusalem for the festival, there was another group of people gathered at the north side of Jerusalem. Look at verses 2-3. “***Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called ‘Bethesda’ and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie---the blind, the lame, the paralyzed.***” The pool’s name is ‘Bethesda’ which means in Aramaic ‘*house of mercy.*’ At that time the Roman Empire built colonnades in its colonial cities to reveal their power and glory. On the other side of the pool, the people of Israel were celebrating the festivals. But the people who gathered around the pool were waiting for God’s mercy. According to verse 3,4 in footnotes, *they waited for the moving of the waters. From time to time an angel of the Lord would come down and stir up the water. The first one into the pool after each such disturbance would be cured of whatever disease they had.* We wonder if this was their faith in the real story or merely a superstition. The people who gathered by the pool were all sick and were waiting for God’s mercy of healing. They were all incapable with incurable diseases; the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed.

Here we see two different pictures of society and two different groups of people. One was the picture of the Jews who celebrated the Festival in the inner city with joy, and the other was the one of those lying down by the pool suffering from pain, loneliness, and sorrow. In a person we often see two sides of this contradictory life and character. In one side they associate with others with joy and cheer, and in the other side they suffer from pain, loneliness, and depression. They pretend to be happy with others, but inside they suffer from mental, emotional, and relational illness. What really makes them frustrated is that they are so helpless that they cannot get out of their situation, and there is no one who really understands them and helps them out.

Look at verses 5-6. “***One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight 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***?” Jesus met a man in the worst case. This man had been invalid for 38 years. What do we expect from this man? What did he expect from others? When the Indian prince Buddha saw the suffering people lying around his castle, he had compassion on them and went into a deep mountain to find an answer for liberation of suffering. But Jesus did not leave this invalid man alone. Instead, he found him and asked him, “*Do you want to get well*?” Through Jesus’ visit and his question we learn a few things. First, Jesus visits us when we suffer most. Jesus does not leave us alone, but he visits us when we are painfully in difficult situations. Jesus comes to us when we hit bottom in our lives, thinking that we have no way out. Remember that we are not alone because Jesus visits us when we are in need. Second, Jesus plants hope for healing. This invalid man must have forgotten about being healed. He failed 38 times, waiting year after year for healing. In fact, he gave up on healing. He barely maintained his life. But Jesus challenged this hopeless man by asking the question, “*Do you want to get well*?” Jesus stirred his heart to have hope for healing. We often give up when we fail repeatedly saying, “I just can’t.” or “I am done.” But Jesus challenges us by saying, “*Do you want to get well*?” Jesus plants the seed of hope for those who think that they are done. Third, we all need Jesus’ healing because we are sick in one way or the other . As I mentioned before, people are somewhat invalid mentally, relationally, and spiritually. I mean that we all need healing from our chronic mental, emotional, and spiritual illness. Some have two eyes, but can’t see Jesus because they are spiritually blind. Others have two strong legs for shopping, but they can’t come to Jesus because they are spiritually crippled. Still, others can’t move and work because they are paralyzed by their sin. They only lie down in their room and complain to God and blame others. Sin is compared to spiritual paralysis. Sin paralyzes men to be powerless and useless. We all need Jesus’ healing from our sin sickness. What makes you invalid in your life? What causes you to be paralyzed? Today Jesus visits us and asks each of us saying, “Do you want to get well?” “Do you want to get out of your impossible situation?” “Do you want to live better and more productive life?” When I thought about myself, I need healing from procrastination. Procrastination is one of bad habits by delaying something which should be done because of laziness and complacency. “Let’s do it tomorrow” is its slogan. Some easily drop out. They cannot endure small sufferings and give up quickly. This is also spiritual paralysis. Others are quick to judge others and bring troubles in relationship with others. We all need healing through Jesus.

Let’s see what made this man in today’s passage invalid for a long time. What was his answer when Jesus asked him, “*Do you want to get well*?” 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 didn’t answer “Yes, Lord. I want to get healed.” Instead, he blamed others who didn’t help him and give him a chance for healing. He shifted the responsibility of his misery and sickness to others. He didn’t admit his own problem at all. Blaming to God and complaining others is also spiritual paralysis. We sometimes feel that we are watching TV program, “*The People’s Court*” In this program no one admits his or her own faults, but blames others to justify themselves. This invalid man also blamed other people that they were wrong and he was right. The more he blamed, the more he felt miserable and his sickness got worse.

How did Jesus help this man who breathed out air of complaints? Look at verse 8. “***Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.***” Jesus didn’t sympathize on him saying, “Oh, I am sorry to hear that. They are selfish, aren’t they?” Jesus didn’t hear his complaining, but commanded him to get up. Here the word, ‘Get up!’ means’ Arise!’ This word is not only to raise him up physically, but also mentally, spiritually with his whole life. The word “Arise” in Greek ‘*egeiro*, is the same word of “raise” in verse 21 when Jesus said that the Father raises the dead and gives them life. Jesus does not want to hear our complaining or blaming others, but wants us to obey his command. Jesus commands each of us to hear his command and obey it. “Get up” (*egeiro*) from the mat of your complacency.” “Get up from the mat of your despair.” “Get up from the mat of your doubt.”

What happened to this man when Jesus commanded him to get up? Verse 9 says that **at once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked**. A miracle happened to this man when he heard Jesus’ word. The power and authority of Jesus’ word overruled all his sick body and soul to be cured. This man didn’t deserve healing because he was full of complaints and negative words. He did not seem to be ready for healing, but the compassion of God raised him from the mat and let him walk. In the same way we don’t deserve for God’s favor because we are not righteous before God. The Bible says that there is no one righteous, not even one. For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God. (Ro 3:10,23) But, God demonstrates his love for us even though we are still sinners, even though we don’t deserve, Christ died for our sins and made us righteous through his blood on the cross. (Ro 5:8) Praise Jesus!

Why did Jesus ask him to pick up his mat and walk? His mat was the symbol of his paralysis as a water jar was the symbol of thirst to the Samaritan woman. Jesus wanted him to live a new life, a mat-free life. Jesus did not want him to go back to his mat again. In fact, we human beings are sinful that we have tendency to go back to our old lifestyle and to lie down on our old mat- a dirty and smelly mat. Jesus commanded the man to pick up his mat and carry it away so that he could not come back to the pool any more.

Have you heard about the word “minimal lifestyle”? In South Korea this lifestyle became popular among young people. The idea of minimal lifestyle is to have less, spend less, do less, need less, and so on. Some young people won’t marry to pursue this lifestyle. Their idea seems to be attractive, but be destructive for the future. They don’t want to marry because they don’t want to be responsible for taking care of their family. They don’t want to have children because they don’t want to be burdened with raising their children. They just want to enjoy their life as a single with responsibility free. What a selfish lifestyle it is! In the beginning God did not make men in that way, not men with petty desire, but made them to be great. God made men to be fruitful and increase in number. God created men to be ruler and stewards of the whole world. But sin makes men paralyzed and leaves their life as a loaf of bread. Our God is great. So we can grow to be great. Young men must have dreams to conquer the whole world. Young men must soar on wings like eagles. But many young people in this generation live like crippled chickens. They have no vision, no dream, and no direction. Many of them are satisfied with minimum payment for three meals a day. They are lying down on the mat of selfishness, indifference, and irresponsibility. Jesus wants them to get up and take their mat and walk.

In the past America was the first missionary sending nation in the world. America has sent many missionaries and Bible teachers to other countries including Korea. God blessed America to be a shepherd nation and priestly kingdom for the whole world. With the vision for world salvation, many young college students volunteered to go out as missionaries by sacrificing their career, family, and future. The Student Volunteer Movement, which started from Yale University, was one of them. They were excited with the words “Young men, be ambitious!” Let us pray for spiritual revival for this nation. Let us pray for young people to restore God’s vision and hope for the whole world. Let us pray that Americans may hear Jesus’ words, “Do you want to get well?” personally and nationally.

**The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”** (9b,10) The Jewish leaders were not happy with the healing of the man because he had been healed on the Sabbath. They thought that Jesus had violated the Sabbath law by healing the man on the Sabbath and that the man had violated the law by carrying the mat. Ritual law and system regulation often kill the act of love and the spirit of humanity. Look at verses 11-13. “***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 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***.” It is surprising that this man had no idea who had healed him. He must have known the name of Jesus at least. He had been healed from his physical paralysis, but he needed healing from spiritual paralysis, too.

**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**.” (14) Jesus intentionally found him at the temple so that the man could not become worse because of his sin. How did the man respond to Jesus’ warning? **The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.** (15) The man should have followed Jesus and learned from him. Instead, he reported to the Jewish leaders who were looking for an opportunity to arrest Jesus. Ingratitude made this man worse than before. Ingratitude is a serious spiritual paralysis to be healed.

In today’s passage Jesus raised an invalid man from the mat. Jesus does not leave us alone when we are in deep trouble. He visits us and helps us. We don’t deserve God’s favor, but Jesus reveals his compassion for us and heals us. When we hear Jesus’ word, “Do you want to get well?” “Get up (*egeiro*). Take your mat and walk”, we will walk. Let us get up from our own mat and walk to follow Jesus. Jesus has power to change us. He has the love to save us. He has authority to command us to get up. Amen!