

June 1 2014

**Scripture Lessons ~**

*Psalm 91, No. 91*

*Acts 1:6-14*

*John 5:1-9*

**Sermon *To Be Well or Not To Be Well? That Is the Question***

At one point in act 3, scene 1 of Shakespeare's Hamlet, the Prince of Denmark, Hamlet of course is the central character in the play, is contemplating suicide; he is contemplating killing himself. He says these familiar these words, "to be or not to be, that is the question? Whether it is nobler in the minds to suffer the slings and arrows of outrageous fortunes; or to take arms against the sea of troubles and by opposing, end them; to die; to flee no more and perchance to sleep to say, we end the heartache of a thousand natural shocks that flesh is heir to.

Our Gospel lesson from John's chapter 5, might suggest a similar question to that of Shakespeare's Hamlet. I used it as a title to my sermon for today, to be well or not to be well? That is the question. And it may be referring to another suicide of a sort as well but instead of it being a physical side which Hamlet is contemplating. I am convinced that it may be referring to the possibility of spiritual suicide, if we choose not to be spiritual well in our lives of faith. Now John set Jesus in this passage in the midst of Jewish festival in Jerusalem near one of the city gates at a pool called Beth-zetha or perhaps better known to us as Bethesda. Tradition had it that certain times of the year an angel of the Lord would come and sort of stir the waters in the pool and then whoever stepped into the water first after the stirring of the waters, would be healed of whatever disease plagued that person. You and I can imagine what the scene in Jesus day might have been like around this pool. The place was probably mobbed with people that had all manner of illnesses considering the state of medical care in the time of Jesus. And all were desperate. Desperate to get into the pool just after the waters were being stirred.

But you know true to form, Jesus in the midst of all this chaos and all of this desperation, pauses and looks out, and he spots one man. And he chooses to focus on him; and to focus on his situation; and focus on him in a personal and in a kind of individual kind of way. We are told that the man that Jesus' focus on, has been ill for 38 years; maybe almost all of his life but with what we are never quite told. And as usual Jesus addresses him with a kind of probing and seemingly silly question. Do you want to be made well? Do you want to be made well? We almost want to

pull Jesus aside and explain what kind of fool question is that, Jesus. Of course the man wants to be well but Jesus receives a somewhat strange answer from this man. The man says, Sir I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is being stirred up and while I am making my way somebody always steps down ahead of me into the pool. This makes us kind of wonder at the man presumably he had been ill for 38 years. He has been at this for an awfully long time. So why it is in all those years he hasn't been able to make it into the pool? Jesus' response to the man seems kind of stern and kinda abrupt. He doesn't mince words, he just says, "Stand up. Take your mat. Walk. We can almost read between the lines that sometimes is dangerous but I do it anyway. I imagine Jesus saying, "I come on, enough of this, get up and get with and walk. Whatever the case may be in these brief words of Jesus is, the man gets up and he does walk.

So what do I do with this passage, I could go several ways with it. I could speculate with all of you some of the reasons including myself, seem to sabotage our own physical well being through poor health practices like all the eating I do back here on a Sunday morning or the attitudes that we have as we are in healing processes.

Physical health is not my expertise and I am always wary whenever I get into this slippery slope about judgmentalism as we contemplate and some people do for the reason for whatever illnesses we or others might be experiencing in our physical self. I do think there is good precedent in scripture to look at this passage in a spiritual way too. In fact several times in the Gospels, Jesus connects physical well being with spiritual well being. We are reminded that our life in the physical world around us is very much affected by whether our spiritual lives are healthy parts of our life.

So we could imagine Jesus and Hamlet in choosing to ask that that question, "To be made well or not to be made well, that is the question". Where the Gospel records Jesus asking, "Do you really want to make well?" You might think on this passage Jesus saw the man's response lovingly and truthfully, nevertheless as a kind of excuse. And he was also wondering as well we might be wondering, how the man had managed to come year after year never, ever, ever get into that pool?. So the question remains, "Do you want to be made well?" "Do you?" "Do I?" Do we as a church? Do we as individuals within this church? Do we want to be made spiritual well?

Speaking of it in spiritual terms or in the terms of our spiritual lives, that is our walk with Jesus Christ. These questions occurred to me in the context of this passage. Some people express desire to have a better prayer life. I can imagine Jesus might say to them, well, and then pray. Some people have expressed to me, they would like to be more worshipful in church in order to start their week off in much more positive way. Then I might imagine in this context, Jesus saying then

why don't you want to show up? Why don't you want to worship? Do you want to know more about the Bible what it says about God's love for you and for the world? Jesus might say well take time to read it. Do you want a more active living church here in Newport, Washington? Jesus might say don't sit on your duff, do something about it. Do you want to be a more positive person? Do you to be a person who wants to be more loving, forgiving a person who doesn't hold grudges? Do you want to be a person that lets the past be the past? Jesus might say then start to love, start to forgive, start to be kind, don't hold grudges and try to let those things in the past go.

Doesn't it sound simple? It sounds a little harsh as well. But I think that Jesus looks at that guy that been sick for 38 years and he said to himself again reading between the lines you can tell me what you think, I think this is baloney. It is time for an attitude adjustment in this situation. I wonder if Jesus says the same thing to you, to us as a church. If you want to be closer to God; If you want to walk with Jesus; If you want to be led by the Holy spirit; I can hear Jesus saying quit lolly gagging around the pool, stand up, take up your mat, and walk. To be made well or not to be made well? that's the question. Together we say AMEN.