

Do You Want to Get Well?

Susan Peabody

One of the men lying there had been sick for 38 years. When Jesus saw him and knew how long he had been ill, He asked him, “Would you like to get well?” “I can’t,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to help me into the pool at the movement of the water. While I am trying to get there, someone else always gets in ahead of me.” Jesus told him, “Stand up, roll up your sleeping mat and go on home.” *John 5:5-8, The Living New Testament*

I believe that to reach our full potential, and to serve Christ to an optimal degree, we must heal the wounds of our past. By wounds, I mean the legacy of neglect and abuse—such things as fear, anger, and shame. Healing our wounds also guarantees that we will not pass our pain on to others and destroy their lives. This is important to me because I carry around many wounds. Most of them are the legacy of a childhood filled with loneliness and depression.

Of course, it took me a long time to realize that I was being held back by my emotional problems, and, when I finally did, I still lacked the motivation to do anything about the situation. Then, one day, while discussing all of this with a friend, she asked me, “What holds you back from getting better? What do you think the block is?” Without thinking, I found myself blurting out, “I am afraid to get better. Mental health is unfamiliar. It is a mystery that lies beyond a closed door and I have no peep hole. That mystery feels like a beast ready to devour me if I open the door. What if getting better is worse than being sick? It can happen. Besides, I think I have bonded to my vision of myself as a victim. I prefer self-pity to self-esteem” “My friend looked at me in surprise, but before she could say anything I left. I really didn’t want to talk about this because it made me feel ashamed.

Not long after this conversation, I sat down to read *The Living Bible*. Without thinking, I turned to the gospel of John. Soon, I got to the story of the sick man by the pool (*John 5:6-8*). I had read this story before, and liked it, but this time when I got to the words, “Would you like to get better?” a loud voice boomed in my head, “No.” At first I was shocked by this passionate and spontaneous response to the question Jesus had posed, and I didn’t know what to make of it. Then I remembered my earlier conversation with my friend.

As I began to reflect on this story in *John*, in terms of what I had revealed to my friend about my fear of getting better and my victim mentality, I found it particularly fascinating that once Christ confronts the sick man about whether or not he wants to get well, the man in question begins to make excuses. (Don't we all.) And the man never really answers Christ. (If he is anything like me he probably just stood there looking sheepish, trying to find more excuses for going back to his bed.) Fortunately for the man (and for me) Jesus let him off the hook and simply gave him the answer to his dilemma. "Stand up, roll up your sleeping mat and go home." In other words, do something—take action—don't sit around the pool in a state of suspended animation.

So this is what I did. I got down on my knees and prayed for the willingness, courage, and guidance to change. I said out loud, "Yes! Lord! I want to get well!" Then I picked up my mat, or in my case got out of bed both literally or figuratively, and went home.

Home, as it turned out, is both a metaphorical and physical place. Metaphorically, it is that place in my heart where my soul resided before the trauma and where today I am a free and unblemished spirit unencumbered by my fears and illusions. Literally, it is the church where I can incorporate the Christian disciplines of prayer, meditation, confession, study, submission, and worship into my life—all the things that are helping me get better. Most of all, it is behind that door I was so afraid of where the Holy Spirit teaches me everything I need to know about reaching my full potential as a human being.

So remember the lesson of the sick man by the pool. Christ is not going to heal us without our permission. We must say yes to mental health. We must get past your reservations about being happy (as strange as that sounds). And we must do something—sometimes even before the willingness comes.