

We are more comfortable with the known than the unknown even if the known is uncomfortable. The man who reclined by the pool for thirty-eight years made peace with his lot in life, accepted that how things are is how things will be. Life isn't fair, but he fared as well as conditions permitted.

Think of it: thirty-eight years, most of his life, probably all of his adult life. He knew everyone at the pool, knew their stories, where they were from, what they imagined doing if they were, somehow, lucky enough to be first into the pool after an angel stirred the waters.

Yet, in thirty-eight years he had not arranged for anyone to help him into the pool? Thus, Jesus' question: “Do you *want* to be made well?”

Do we really want to give up our illusions about life, our deceits about the kind of people we are, all those false images about the past and fantasies concerning the future? These illusions, deceits, fantasies may have kept us from living our lives fully, but they are comfortable and familiar, and in our minds, they hold together our concept of who we are.

We cannot change in one little corner of our lives without feeling the reverberations in other corners. If the man is healed, what expectations and responsibilities will follow, what accountability? The question—“Do you want to recover?”—might even go to the root of things where the foundations would shake and the whole edifice of his known world would be in danger of collapse.

Did Jesus' question penetrate the man's self-defense? Was he able to ask himself: “Why have I no one to help me into the pool? What in me is satisfied with things as they are?”

Our chances of healing come when the waters of our own life are disturbed. We can plunge into them and emerge new, or we can sit there by the churning depths of our inner world, justifying our existence as it is.

Never think that change is easy or that it comes suddenly or without pain. It is a strange and frightening discovery to find that what binds us is also what gives us comfort and a measure of feeling safe. Change, while it has promise, will take from us something that we have found sweet.

The healing of the man by the pool has nothing to do with faith. Jesus doesn't ask the man what he believes, who he believes, or even if he believes. For this man the distance between illness and healing is desire: “Do you *want* to be made well?”

You know what I find curious: the man never answers the question. Does he really want to be made well and enter more fully into life, into a world that requires more from him than he has ever given, or does he prefer the security of the five porticoes of Solomon?

Lest you think this question unkind, a closer reading of the text clarifies its necessity. “In these (five porticoes) lay a large number of *ill*, blind, lame, and crippled. One man was there who had been *ill* for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been *ill* for 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; *while I am on my way*, someone else gets down there before me’ (NABRE). He is *ill*, a *sick* man, but not necessarily blind, lame, or crippled.

The man is able to move on his own, he just doesn’t move very quickly—someone always beats him into the pool? Why? How far from the pool does he lunch with his friends?

When life becomes too challenging and engagement with others too demanding, being made well, losing whatever illusions, deceits, or fantasies that keep us from living fully, can make restless boredom, frantic escapism, and even enervating despair more tolerable.

We can be cured and not healed; we can be healed and not cured. A cure comes with the elimination of all evidence of disease. A single bladder infection can be treated with an antibiotic, and three days later we can return to life as we knew it.

The etymology of the words “healing” and “health” are linguistically related to “whole” and “holy.” To be healed is to be made whole, to know the sacredness of life. Healing is the restoration of mind and spirit, the strengthening of the will, to live fully and freely.

The psalmist prays that God’s saving health may be known among all *nations*. The visionary of Revelation knows the leaves of the tree of life are for the healing of the *nations*. The question that needs to penetrate the false images of our history, the illusions about our differences, the fantasies about our future is: Do we, as a nation, *want* to be healed?

Will we stand up to the racism that is killing us or recline by the pool justifying our prejudices? Will we stand up to the big lie that threatens our democratic way of life or perpetuate it, profit from it? Will we realize the vision of our motto (e pluribus unum) “out of many, one,” or will we support the supremacy of one over many?

The waters are turbulent; the choice is ours.