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## The Paralytic – 2020

### Acts 9:32-42 & John 5:1-15

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The healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda, in our Gospel reading this morning is a good example of God's wonderful power. This man, who could not walk for 38 years, soon became a burden to society. He may have lost some self-respect in living such an unproductive life for all those years. Because of his physical condition, he could only watch as others were healed miraculously in a nearby pool of water. There was a local belief that the waters of Bethesda had healing powers. When the waters bubbled up, the first one in the water would be cured. The crippled man complained that no one would help him into the pool when the angel stirred the water. So, he was stuck, unable to move, unable to heal himself, and unable to receive God's blessing.

This event occurred during the Jewish feast of Pentecost, which commemorated giving of the law through Moses, the Torah. Jesus saw this poor man, lying near one of the gates to the temple area, and He simply asked the lame man if he wanted to be healed. When the man explained that he had no one to help him into the healing pool, Christ said, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." The man now cured, picked up his mat and left. This healing occurred on the Sabbath day, breaking the Old Testament law. The law stated that no work was to be done on the Sabbath. So, the Jews criticized the man for walking around carrying his bed on that day. In response to the critics' questions, we discover that the healed man did not even know the Lord's name; he could not identify the One who healed him.

In His concern for the healed man's spiritual wellbeing, Jesus came back to reveal himself to this sinner. The Saviour wanted him to have more than just a healthy body. He wanted the one, who once was lame, to be healthy spiritually and physically. St. John tells us, "Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, 'Now you are well again, do not sin anymore, or something worse might happen to you.'" (Jn 5:14 TNJB) Notice, Jesus said, "you are well again." Once, this man could walk. Whatever the cause was for his paralysis, Jesus warned him there was something worse than being physically handicapped; it was spending eternity without God.

As marvelous as that miracle was, spiritual healing was a common practice in Jesus' day, and therefore was forbidden work on the Sabbath. Jesus knew the law and expected to be criticized for breaking it. But Jesus had pity on cripple and healed the paralytic. It might be interesting to note, it was one of the few times in the Scripture when Jesus healed someone without being asked.

Like this poor man, sometimes we have carried burdens in our souls for many years. Perhaps we cannot even imagine being without anger, hatred, greed, lust, pride, self-righteous judgment, sloth or some other sins familiar to us. We may often promise ourselves, "I refuse to act that way anymore! I will not do or say that. I abhor think this way. I promise not to treat him or her as I have before." But all too often, we lack the

strength to change. We are paralyzed by our sins and weakened by a lifetime of giving in to temptation. We may even have accepted the excuse that it is who we are and there is no point in even trying to change. The weight of our sins drags us down.

Dr. Ralph Sockman writes about an experience he had while standing on the edge of Niagara Falls one clear, cold March day. The falls glistened in the bright sun as its rays captured the rushing river. As some birds swooped down to snatch a drink from the clear water, Sockman's companion told how he had seen birds being carried over the edge of the precipice. As they dipped down for a drink, tiny droplets of ice would form on their wings. As they returned for additional drinks more ice would weigh down their bodies until they could not rise above the cascading waters. Flapping their wings, the birds would suddenly drop over the falls. That is how it is with our sins. They weigh us down until we lack the strength to change and enjoy life.

But the good news of Pascha is that the Risen Lord calls each of us to "Rise, take up your bed and walk." God's blessing is not for a select few, but for the whole world: all the living and the dead. The Lord has mercy on those who do not even know His name, just like the paralyzed man. He asks only whether we want to be healed, for He never forces us. And to those who will accept His mercy, the Lord promises the strength to rise, take up our beds and walk, enabling us to live a new life.

During this Easter season, when we remember Christ's victory over death and sin, we want to become like this man who took up his bed and walked, who entered into a new life made possible by the mercy of our Savior Jesus Christ. We want to participate in the blessing that Christ's resurrection has brought to the world, transformed and healed it. For like this man, we are too often paralyzed when we face difficult and painful circumstances in life and are rendered powerless. We cannot snap our fingers and change our world, other people, or even ourselves. We cannot raise the dead, heal diseases, or make our problems go away. We are weakened by our habitual sins, our passions and habits that keep us from experiencing the joy, peace, and freedom of life eternal.

So, let us not only say "Christ is Risen!" this Paschal season; let us rise with Him, and get up from whatever sins have weighed us down. We will find strength in His resurrection to overcome our paralysis and weakness. Let us refuse to be shackled by fear, and move forward step by step, day by day, into the joy of His Kingdom. Now is the time to take up our beds and walk in the brilliant light of the empty tomb, for Christ is Risen!

Amen!