



## **St Francis and St Mary's West Wickham**

### **Sermon: Week 4 – The Man by the Pool of Bethesda**

#### **John 5: 1-15**

Jesus is in Jerusalem for a festival, visits the pool at Bethesda and for some reason, he's drawn to this man who has been lying there for 38 years. He is so infirm that he can't get into the pool quickly enough – there's no one to help him – as this is a very busy, noisy, crowded, competitive situation – it was very much dog eat dog – every man for himself. He's beaten by the system - so he's lost all hope and has just come to accept his awful situation. He just lies there on his mat – day in, day out. Clearly he's been given some food and maybe some small coins as alms, but he's stuck in this cycle of hopelessness and powerlessness.

Yet, in Jesus he has someone who is on his side in his rough time. Here's a friend for him when other friends just can't be found. So Jesus comes

alongside him and asks him what, on the face of it, appears to be a completely daft, stupid question.

***“Do you want to be made well?”***

You would think that the man would answer straight away

***“Yes, of course I want to be made well”***

Yet he doesn't. He has just got to the point where hope has gone and he feels completely powerless. So he says:

***“Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; and while I am making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.”***

The sick man has a 'victim' mentality. When Jesus asks him 'Do you want to be made well?' he's giving the sick man a choice. He's saying – 'Look, I can help you out of your despair, powerlessness and hopelessness. You may think that you have no friends, but I am offering to rescue you from this horrendous situation. I can give you a new hope, new encouragement, a new direction - I can set you free. Do you want to be made well? It's your choice. Together we can do this. Jesus knows that this is what the sick man needs more than anything. He needs to change – to move on from where he

was simply stuck in life. He needs to help himself – so Jesus gives him a very direct instruction:

***‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’***

So the man does just that – he makes a definite choice – he chooses life. The choice wasn’t forced on him – he made that choice of his own free will and in choosing life he is completely transformed:

***At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.***

He began to walk – something he hadn’t done for 38 years – because Jesus had helped him make the choice to take back control of his life.

It’s very easy to get defeated by ‘the system’ and people get desperate. We have had clients visit the work club in the library on Monday afternoons who have felt completely helpless and powerless because they have been defeated by the system in the Job Centre. Their benefits have been sanctioned because they don’t understand the system and there’s been no one alongside them to guide them, encourage them and help them. But, as with the man at the pool, they need to make that choice – do they want to accept assistance – do they want to take back control of their life?

Coming alongside someone in this way often means taking a huge risk for both parties. Jesus

takes a risk in healing the man at the pool on the Sabbath – that was against the religious rules. The man took a risk because the same rules stated that it was not allowed to carry your mat on the Sabbath. In order to change – to take a new direction – to choose life – we often have to challenge the rules – to break down the barriers. But choosing life is a risk worth taking.

Paracletis is about coming alongside someone in their storm of life and sometimes encouraging them and enabling them to choose life – to journey with them as they change – helping them to live life well, not unwell. That journey can be risky, but it is a rare privilege.

**Lord, the more we realise how many people we meet are struggling in their lives, the more we feel compelled to come alongside. Deepen our compassion and concern for them as the days go by that we might truly be the people that you can use in their lives.**

**AMEN**