

HOPE FOR BROKENNESS

John 5: 2-10; 7: 21-24

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SCRIPTURE

Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

"Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and walk." At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath, and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, "It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat" (John 5:2-10 TNIV).

[Later, these same religious leaders confronted Jesus.]

Jesus said to them, "I did one miracle, and you are all amazed. Yet, because Moses gave you circumcision (though actually it did not come from Moses, but from the patriarchs), you circumcise a boy on the Sabbath. Now if a boy can be circumcised on the Sabbath so that the law of Moses may not be broken, why are you angry with me for healing a man's whole body on the Sabbath? Stop judging by mere appearances, but instead judge correctly" (John 7:21-24 TNIV).

PART ONE: DRAMA - "THESE PARTS"

One day a stranger appears in These Parts and tells an impaired family they can be whole...

PART TWO: APPLICATION

INTRODUCTION

I hope I am not insulting anybody's intelligence this morning when I make the obvious point that the Stranger in the previous drama represents Jesus Christ and the rest of the characters represent people who could just as easily be you or me. The drama is based on a true story - Jesus really did walk this earth and people really did respond to him in

different ways. But this story is also a continuing drama - Jesus died and then was made alive again. And he is still alive today offering hope for our brokenness. How will you respond?

1. IS THERE BROKENNESS IN YOUR LIFE BUT YOU WON'T ADMIT IT?

Is there brokenness in your life but you won't admit it? This was true of many people in Jesus' day including many religious people. Those who think their souls are without disease will not welcome the spiritual Physician. This was the case with the Pharisees; they despised Christ, because they thought themselves whole. They resented any implication that they needed help.

Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt 9:12-13 NIV).

When Jesus said, "I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners," we must understand what he was saying. He was not saying that there were some people who were so good that they had no need of anything which he could give; nor was he saying there are people who do not need him because they can cure themselves. Rather Jesus was saying, "I came to invite people who are conscious of their shortcomings and desperately aware of their need for a Savior."

People who will not admit their brokenness tend to become angry people. They are more concerned with criticism than encouragement. They think of themselves as "good" people as opposed to "bad" people but it is a "goodness" which issues in condemnation rather than forgiveness and mercy. Is there brokenness in your life but you won't admit it?

2. IS THERE BROKENNESS IN YOUR LIFE BUT YOU WANT GOD TO DEAL WITH IT ON YOUR TERMS?

Or is there brokenness in your life but you want God to deal with it only on your terms? This was the attitude of the paralyzed man whom Jesus healed at the Pool of Bethesda - a healing which triggered the anger and hostility mentioned in our Scripture reading from John.

The first thing Jesus did was to ask the man if he wanted to get well. It was not such a foolish question as we may think. The man had been an invalid for 38 years. He may well have given up hope. But this man did want to be well. However, he had a restricted idea as to how God could go about making him better. The man believed that God had to send an angel to stir up the water in the pool and if someone picked him up and placed him in the water then and only then would he be cured. Keep in mind he was telling all of this to Jesus. How ironic to give this elaborate explanation of how he can be healed to the one person in the universe who could restore him with a simple word of love - and did so!

Is there brokenness in your life but you want God to deal with it on your terms? And what are those terms? Do you tell God how he has to help you? Do you insist that he follow your timetable?

3. IS THERE BROKENNESS IN YOUR LIFE AND YOU ARE WILLING TO ENTRUST IT TO GOD?

Or is there brokenness in your life and you are willing to turn it over to God?

Each day we are to present to the Lord the whole of our lives - our joys as well as sorrows, our successes as well as failures, our hopes as well as fears. We must learn to offer ourselves - "warts" and all - to God. If we keep waiting until we feel "worthy" of God, we will move farther away rather than closer to him. It is through our brokenness that the grace and power of God become real to us.

God says, "I am your God and will be faithful to you even when you won't be faithful to me." Henri Nouwen points out that:

Throughout human history, this divine faithfulness is shown to us in God's increasing desire for intimacy. At first God was the God for us, our protector and shield. Then, when Jesus came, God became the God with us, our companion and friend. Finally, when Jesus sent his Spirit, God was revealed to us as the God within us, our very breath and heartbeat.

Let us entrust our brokenness, indeed, are very lives, to the One who lived, died and lives again for us.

CONCLUSION

Life is full of brokenness - broken relationships, broken promises, broken expectations, broken dreams. This brokenness will breed bitterness and resentment unless we turn it over to God. The life of bitter brokenness leads to despair. But the life given over to Christ is renewed. Because of what he did for us we know that the many setbacks of life can move us forward to an ever greater and more intimate bond with the God who keeps his promises. And how do we know this? Because the same power which raised Jesus from the dead is the power behind the promises of God. We can believe the promises of God.

"This is how much God loved the world: He gave his Son, his one and only Son. And this is why: so that no one need be lost; because by believing in him, anyone can have a whole and lasting life" John 3:16 (paraphrased).

Amen.