



## Broad Street Presbyterian Church

760 East Broad Street • Columbus Ohio 43205 • (614) 221-6552 • fax (614) 221-5722 • [www.bspsc.org](http://www.bspsc.org)

### “Healing Can’t Wait”

John 5:1-9

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Reverend Amy Miracle  
Broad Street Presbyterian Church  
Columbus, OH

Some things cannot wait. Exiting a burning building. Fixing the puncture in your car’s tire. Letting the credit card company know that you have lost your card. Stopping a bloody nose. Some things can’t wait.

Some things, I know from experience, can wait. Yard work. Cleaning out the garage. Visiting the dentist. Binge watching *Game of Thrones*. I plan to do all these things. Eventually. For now, they can wait.

In today’s passage, we meet a man who has been ill for thirty-eight years. That’s a long time to be sick. A really long time to wait to be well. Jesus, who so often takes his time, who never seems to be in a hurry, does not wait to heal this man. It’s the Sabbath, a day set aside to do no work, a day of rest and really Jesus should put off the healing until Monday. After thirty-eight years, what’s one more day? Jesus doesn’t wait. Evidently, this man’s healing cannot wait.

At the same time, Jesus doesn’t rush the healing. He takes a moment to ask the man a question.

Do you want to be made well?

That’s a good question. Jesus doesn’t assume he knows the answer.

The man does not answer “yes.” Instead, he offers up some excuses for why healing hasn’t happened. It’s the fault of other people, he insists.

Do you want to be made well?

Jesus, the savior of the world, the embodiment of all that is holy and whole, is standing in front of the man. Why can’t he answer with an uncomplicated “yes”? “Yes, sign me up. Yes, I want to be well. Yes, I want my life to be different, better. Yes, Jesus, yes.”

How about you?

Do you want to be made well?

Is there any answer other than “yes”? There are many, many other answers to that question.

I’m betting that as a group, we are familiar with some of those other answers. As a group, we are much more comfortable meeting the needs of others than identifying and addressing our own needs. When asked the question, “Do you want me to be made well?” our response will most likely be tortured and apologetic. Something like, “Oh, thanks for asking but I’m good. I’m good. I’ve got everything under control. Sure, I’ve got some issues and challenges but there are others more worthy and I wouldn’t want to be the center of attention in that way. So, thanks for asking but I’m good.”

More sermons can be found online at <https://subsplash.com/broadstreetpresbyterian/sermons>

This tendency to focus on the needs of other rather than our own is an admirable trait. But, like anything, it can be taken too far. It can turn into a syndrome – a not very healthy syndrome.

I call it the “there’s-something-wrong-with-me-but-I’m-not-going-to-tell-anyone-because-that-would-make-me-look-selfish-and-besides-people-should-be-able-to-figure-it-out-on-their-own-and-if-they-don’t-figure-it-out-I’m-going-to-punish-them-for-not-doing-a-better-job-of-guessing-at-what-I-need” syndrome.

Are you familiar with it?

Midwesterners are particularly prone to this syndrome. The last thing any of us want to be is selfish. Or demanding. We were brought up to model ourselves on Joan of Arc not Marie Antoinette. Don’t draw attention to yourself. See to the needs of others first. Work out your problems quietly, privately. Certainly, don’t bother God or the church. Everyone has better things to do than see to our small, insignificant needs.

We find it so much easier to pray for the needs of others. We find it so much easier to pray for the needs of our nation and world. But, we are not so skilled when it comes to praying for our own healing. For so many of us, it’s easier to sit back and be miserable than to risk saying what we want and need – to risk being that clear – to say to God this is what I want – this is what I need- this is what I long for – this is what I ache for.

Don’t ask and you won’t be disappointed. Don’t seek and you won’t miss what you don’t find.<sup>1</sup>

I remember the time of day, the layout of the room, the pattern of the rug and the exact color and texture of the faux leather chair I was sitting in when I realized that God’s healing was available for me. I had long thought it was available for others. I was a child who earnestly prayed for the health and well-being of others but it never crossed my mind to pray for my own healing. As a young adult, I discovered that this question “Do you want to be made well?” was addressed to me.

I still struggle to believe that I deserve to be well, that I deserve all the wholeness that is available in this broken world. I suspect that you struggle with this as well.

Whether you like it or not, this story is all about you. Not about the person sitting next to you or behind you. It’s not about your sick friend or your long-suffering aunt. This story is about you - your health – your right to be whole – the abundant life that awaits you – the hopes and dreams that have taken up residence within you.

This passage challenges us not to wait another day to claim God’s healing and wholeness.

Back to the man. Thirty-eight years is a long time to be unwell. I wonder if he ever wishes that Jesus had stopped by a little earlier in his life. Because healing can’t wait. Equally true is that it’s never too late for healing. It’s never too late to take a step towards health and wholeness and restoration. I think of a woman in her 80’s who watched much of the Brett Kavanaugh hearing. In the midst of the testimony, she revisited something that happened to her in her 20’s. She revisited an incident that she had long ago tucked away, hidden, buried. She revisited it and realized that she was a survivor of sexual assault. And then she did a very brave thing. She made an appointment to see a therapist. For the first time in her life, she talked about what happened. She heard that question of Jesus:

Do you want to be made well?

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<sup>1</sup> Barbara Brown Taylor, *Home by Another Way*, p. 202.

And she answered “yes.” Answering yes to that question can be scary. It makes us vulnerable, sets us up for disappointment. At the same time, it is the only path to the abundant life that God wants for us all.

Do you want to be made well?

It is never too late to answer “yes” to that question. But, why wait? Why wait another day? Today, Jesus insists, is a good day to walk towards healing and health. Today is a good day to do a small or large thing that leads us on a path of wholeness.

Don’t wait. Start today. Do something – anything that leads you towards healing and wholeness. Exercise. Call a friend. Get a referral to a therapist. Take a walk. Read a book. Listen to music that brings you joy. Cook something healthy and delicious. Delete a game from your phone. Put on sunscreen. Forgive someone. Forgive yourself. Make an appointment that you’ve been putting off in hopes that your health problem will magically resolve itself. Begin or deepen a practice of prayer or meditation.

Do you want to be made well?

Jesus is calling you by name and asking you,

Do you want to be made well?

The answer is “yes.”