

“The Healing Waters of Warm Springs”
John 5:1-9

Preached by Dr. Robert F. Browning, Pastor
Smoke Rise Baptist Church
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The water flowing out of the spring on the edge of Pine Mountain maintains a constant temperature of eighty-eight degrees. The Indians brought the sick and wounded to the mineral rich spring to be healed. Countless others followed them, the most famous being Franklin Delano Roosevelt, the thirty-second President of the United States.

In 1924, Roosevelt gave national recognition to Warm Springs when he visited the heated mineral springs as treatment for his polio-related paralysis. So enchanted was he with Warm Springs that he built the only home he ever owned in this little South Georgia town. This modest six-room cottage was dubbed The Little White House while he was President. Roosevelt died of a massive stroke there on April 12, 1945 while sitting for a portrait.

People in biblical times believed the water in the pool of Bethesda had healing powers. An angel would periodically stir the waters, they thought, and the first to enter the pool after it was disturbed would be healed. In all reality, the pool was fed by an underground stream that would occasionally bubble up and disturb the water. Whatever caused the water to move, large numbers of sick and lame people would sit under the five porches each day hoping to be the next person healed.

John tells us about a man that had been crippled for thirty-eight years, longer than many lived in that culture. He was sitting around the pool the day Jesus walked by and caught his attention. Listen to the evangelist’s description.

“When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked, ‘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 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” John 5:6-9.

The part of this story that touches me is the lame man’s response to Jesus’ question about healing. When asked if he wanted to get well, he 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 ahead of me.”

Interesting response. Why didn’t he reply with a simple yes or no? I think he wanted Jesus to know that he wanted to get well but the reason he had not made it to the water and been healed was not for lack of desire but lack of a friend. He did not remain lame because of neglect or indifference but because of isolation and abandonment. No one helped him and he could not do it on his own no matter how hard or often he tried. The fact that he was still going to the pool after thirty-eight years was a testimony to his effort. It just wasn’t sufficient, though.

I like B. W. Johnson’s description of what might have repeatedly occurred around this pool. Of this man, Johnson writes, “Can you sense his frustration and hopelessness? Day after day he struggled to get to that pool because it represented his only hope for healing. Suddenly the waters begin to bubble and pandemonium breaks out. Only one person will be healed and every person is in competition with all gathered around the pool. Can you imagine the pushing, shoving and tripping that takes place?”

It must have been a pathetic sight filled with chaos, confusion and disgust for all but one, usually the least impaired. There was but one step between many and a cure. The lame man knew that his odds of being first were very slim unless someone helped him. Perhaps that is what he prayed for each day, that someone would come to his aid. I wonder how many are voicing that same prayer today.

I am convinced there are many in our society that will never make it to the water without help. No matter how hard or often they try, they will never make it. Their situation will not improve unless someone comes to their aid, not to rescue them but enable them to help themselves.

They need someone to be the presence of Christ in their lives bringing hope and healing. They need someone to help them get an education, a job, a decent place to live and medical attention. They

need someone that will instill confidence in them, teach them how to manage their time and money, show them how to have healthy relationships and help them overcome guilt and shame. They need someone that will introduce them to Jesus, the Great Physician, the wise teacher and the blessed redeemer. **Will you be that person?**

I listened one night last week with great interest to Geoffrey Canada, President and CEO of The Harlem Children's Zone. This organization's fifteen centers serve more than 12,500 children and adults in some of New York's most devastated neighborhoods. The Harlem Children's Zone has two goals: to identify infants and toddlers that need support so they will be ready to go to school and to work with teens to give them good role models. "Our government spends \$29,000 a year to house a person in prison. For \$3,000 a year I can turn a potential criminal into a productive citizen," stated Canada. "Help me help these kids," he pleaded with his audience.

Recently, I told you about Warrick Dunn's generosity. For eight years the Atlanta Falcon's running back has been assisting single mothers in their attempt to provide for their families. Because of his own mother's struggles, he knows how hard it is to make ends meet as a single mom and wants to help as many as possible.

One of his projects is called "Home for the Holidays." This program assists single parents in owning their first homes by helping them with down payments and furnishings, everything from furniture, draperies, groceries and even toothbrushes. He has helped fifty-two mothers and one hundred thirty-five children in his hometown of Baton Rouge as well as Tampa and Atlanta.

Patricia is a former crack addict who once had three of her five children taken away by the state. She has been clean eight years and all her kids live with her at home. Kimberly once lived in a homeless shelter, a victim of spouse abuse. Now she lives safely in her own home with her children. Bonnie often could not pay the electric bill on her drafty apartment. Now she is about to graduate from college. Renee arrived in Florida with her son and all her meager possessions in her car. Soon she will begin nursing school. "I always felt it was me against the world," she said. "This is not true anymore."

Who needs you to be the presence of Christ in their life? Who needs you to stand with them against a hostile and intimidating world? Do you have a family member or friend that is struggling to get to the water? Before you answer this question, you may want to answer another. **Who helped you get to the water?**

Who was the presence of Christ in your life when you were sick and nursed you back to health? Who gave you hope when you were reeling in despair? Who encouraged you when you were depressed? Who opened their pocketbook when you were broke? Who made it possible for you to get an education? Who put a roof over your head and food in your stomach? Who soothed your hurts or comforted you when you were grieving? Who listened to you when you were at your wit's end? Who did your work when you were too tired? Who shared the gospel with you and offered you forgiveness and recovery from foolish mistakes? Who provided a safe place for you to fall? Who helped you get to the water? Now, whom do you need to help?

Mary Halvorson makes an interesting point in her article, "Good Stewards." "Individuals and isolation are unthinkable in African cultures. People greet each other by using an expression related to health and well-being. 'I am in good health if you are.' The health and well-being of an individual depend upon the well-being of his or her community."

Now, let me ask the question again. Who needs you to be the presence of Christ in their life? Ask God to open your eyes and heart.

I would be remiss if I did not point out, however, that some of the people around the pool that need help getting to the water are in this service? You may be one. You may be silently screaming today for help to get to the water. You are lame and barely making it from day to day, about ready to give up. What do you do?

Let this church be your pool of Bethesda. Let us connect you to Jesus and support groups that will help you get to the water. Share your life with us and trust us to help you. Join hearts and hands with us on your journey. This is why we are here and I have to believe it is why you are here this morning.