

WILT THOU BE MADE WHOLE? John 5:2-16

The rain has finally stopped. I look round, watching droplets splash into the pool from the underneath of the old stone arch, my home for so many years. Some catch the emerging sunlight in quick reflection and vanish with the tiniest ripple in the water a few feet from where I lie. I glance round at four other porches, recognising fellow sufferers I have known for so very long. One catches my glance, nods, and we smile. But it doesn't mean much. I watch another rain drop vanish. It makes me think...my life is not much different. Thirty-eight long years have I been here, and nothing to show for it. My infirmity is how I am known, a cruel and self-fulfilling identity.

SELF-PITY

The near-by sheep market echoes with shouts and cries. Each year it has grown noisier, much like those gathered round this pool, - each hoping for their personal miracle, - but each year it just grows in number and frustration. There seems nothing to live for, - the stirring of the water by what was deemed to be an angel may heal some, - but for me there is no chance. Another drop catches the sun and vanishes in the waiting water. Self-pity wells up. How I wish I could at least have a moment of sunshine in my life. I think of the prophet Isaiah, - "Arise, shine, for thy light is come" and oh how empty my childhood learning seems when I'm so hopelessly stuck here, idly watching rain drops! It makes me doubt whether those stories were ever true. Just look around me! Where is God, where our Saviour?

A stranger is approaching, moving slowly, sharing the odd word and a smile with those he passes. He regards each of them, - it feels like he is searching their thoughts. He looks so out of place in this hell hole of wasted humanity, but he does have a distinct air of authority. He is wearing a seamless white robe that fits him so well but is in such stark contrast to the rags that we are all wearing. He is moving towards me. Reaches me. Stops.

LOVE

His eyes hold mine. I feel him searching my very soul, reading my thoughts, exposing everything I have ever thought. Yet there is such love, a love I had forgotten existed. He speaks to me, and it is as though Love itself is reaching out:

"Wilt thou be made whole?"

What a question! I feel like shouting "Yes, Yes!", but then a hundred thoughts come racing in, a sudden fear of change, leaving all that I have got used to, my bed-ridden identity, the constant sympathy, am I really willing to change? In my confusion I give the stock statement I have shared so many years when people ask "How long?"

"Sir, I have no man, when the water is troubled, to put me in to the pool but while I am coming, another steppeth down before me".

His question is serious! My thoughts are everywhere. Yet he knows my true answer, he has seen in me something I have never seen before. His words are with an authority not his own but yes, I suddenly believe, come straight from God. From God. I feel he is at one with God. The presence of Love fills my consciousness even as I am answering, and the self-pity, resentment, bitterness, the long years here, have suddenly all become nothing in the everything of the Love he is sharing. "Wilt thou be made whole?" It's such a deep question!

What's he seeking from me? A complete change in my thinking? Just like that? In an instant? I perceive in his love something deep and new. Am I ready to see myself as he sees me? I suddenly yearn to be free with the freedom he is offering!

He has awakened a desire for me to be what I truly am, and I now know that I

must hold on to that wholeness, that freedom, and not my infirmity! The word "Yes" is unspoken and he responds:

"Rise, take up thy bed, and walk."

To obey is to confirm my hope and his understanding. Is it really that easy! I feel I am in the presence of what must be the Christ, a divine command coming as from God, as surely as it must have been in the very beginning: "Let there be light" with its consequential "And there was light." The command is self-fulfilling. He is expecting me to prove my answer! How many thoughts cram into a few seconds! He asked if I wanted to be made whole. Can I simply forget all those wasted years? Yet my physical history is so clearly an irrelevance, for it was never God-given. My thought has been woken as if out of a dream to what is reality, and this man has ordered me with all the authority of God to "Rise". And how my thought *has* risen! The power of that Love which shines from him, *has* lifted me, and with that power I obey. Yes, I obey!

FREEDOM!

I get up because I *am* whole, yes, I stand as naturally as why not, - immediately! I don't need my bed anymore, and obeying his command, hoist it up on my shoulder, and walk, - all in one easy glorious movement! It seems the most normal thing, and there is a joy and genuine spring in my steps. I look round to thank this man, but he has gone from my sight! I see only crowds of people.

I try to find him, amazed at how effortlessly I am walking. In my eagerness I can't but help knock into people with my bed held aloft. I'm not used to moving in such crowds. My apologies are met with an immediate outcry, - "What are you doing carrying a bed on the sabbath! It's not lawful!" I've hurt no one, but yes, I realise I have disobeyed the sabbath law! The Jews gather round, anxious to make their point, - demanding to know why I was thus working. They have no interest in the fact I have been healed, - it's not what interests them, - but they demand to know who healed me, who gave me the order to break the Sabbath and carry my bed. But I don't know, I can tell them nothing more.

GRATITUDE

I decide to go into the temple – it's just nearby. I must give thanks! I am a new person, - the word "whole" keeps ringing through my consciousness, - "*whole, whole*" - the past forgotten, the future full of now. I find a place to kneel quietly in prayer and contemplation. Why do we all have to wait

for an angel that only comes at a certain season to the pool? Why did he heal *me*? Perhaps I represented all the waiting and helplessness, - people knew I had been there the longest. And this healing was and is for all to see. He spoke the word, and I was immediately healed. Time was not a factor. I didn't have to wait for whatever was the truth to become true. Wholeness must be a fundamental truth? I am what God made me. I just had to be obedient, and the healing followed there and then! If I can be healed, so can anybody! Truth is universal. And then the more wonderful thought, in God's kingdom there is nothing to heal! I live in God's kingdom! And a further revelation, - the five porches represent the physical kingdom, the five senses, and I was now free of them all.

The healer suddenly appears in front of me and speaks to me again:

"Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee."

His words cleanse through me. *I am made whole. I am made whole.* The truth of my being which I never knew before. And the simple command to stay true to my perfect self, not to go back and dwell on the past, but to be what I am, to awake to my true being, in the now of the love that this man shared and a love which is embracing me yet again.

Several people are with him, and I ask one of them "Who is this man?" He looks at me with natural love in his eyes, and simply says – "Jesus of Nazareth". That means nothing to me, I'd never heard of Nazareth, but I make my way back to the pool and see some of the Jews that had questioned me and tell them it was Jesus of Nazareth that had made me whole.

They have no joy for my healing. Only anger because they do not understand and have to fall back on their cold laws. They want to assert their authority, they want to kill him who is bringing life and truth and love!

I go back to the temple and pray once more. I now know I have seen the Christ. I have seen and become witness to love in action. I weep tears of gratitude and joy – Jesus had not been put off by my excuses, instead his love reached out to me, and woke my thought.

He'd asked me this question. **"Wilt thou be made whole?"** and later gave me the truth: **"Behold, thou art made whole."** And freedom from sin followed.

He has shown me his Father and my Father, lifting my thought, waking me to recognise my true being. It didn't matter what my dream had been, - I suddenly saw its nothingness, - the last thirty-eight years as empty as the countless generations Adam's deep sleep represented. I'm awake to see the wonder of all that God has made, and it includes me! I can see it! I am whole!

AWAKE TO REALITY!

The Psalmist sang, "*I am fearfully and wonderfully made*". I now see and live in God's light. It all comes down to this: ***My life has not changed, it has been revealed!***

"Behold, thou art made whole!"