

Mother's Day is a day of celebration and sorrow

it is time for church leaders to come to grips with both the pain and praise of this day. For many, it is indeed a day of flowers, cards, dinner and much jubilation. For others, it is a reminder of what is now lacking or what never existed. Congregations must also find ways to include "nontraditional" images of motherhood on this day, i.e., teen mothers, women who have experienced miscarriages and women who have had abortions.

what Mother's

Day means to teen mothers, women who have had abortions, women who are unable to have children who desire to have children and women who have had miscarriages

## **Courage to be Whole**

by Kyle Childress

[John 5: 1-9](#)

Jesus is in Jerusalem and he goes by the Pool of Bethesda. This pool, fed by an underground spring, is down, off of the street, and is surrounded by porticoes offering some shade and shelter. Legend said that on occasion an angel would trouble the waters of the pool and the first person into the water would be healed. Hence, the pool and the surrounding area had become the gathering place for anyone and everyone with some sort of sickness, but especially the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. All gathered watching the surface of the water for the smallest sign of the rippling of the waves. A small bubbling from the underground spring or even a slight breeze could cause a stampede of invalids trying to be the first into the water.

And Jesus asks this man lying over to one side, "Do you want to be made whole?"

"No thanks, I think I'll just stay here on my pallet and wait for the waters to ripple. I've been here 38 years and I know what to expect and I know all of the other people nearby. True, I'm probably not going to get better, but – you know – I've gotten used to being here, so thanks all the same, Jesus but

I'll just lie here."

Do we fear the cure more than the illness? Bill Coffin said that if it is hell to be guilty, it's certainly scarier to be responsible – response-able – able to respond to God's call, able to respond to the word and love of Jesus. When we cease being a victim – "I can't get to the water Jesus; there's always someone else who gets there first" – and start being responsible then our legs are strong enough for us to walk beside others who are in pain and need help. Our arms are empowered to embrace our enemies and the outcasts. We no longer make excuses; instead we walk forward to new life in Jesus Christ and go to work serving, healing, hoping, and living a life of joy and fullness.

Charles Campbell, in his outstanding book, *The Word Before the Powers*, wonders that if one of the ways the Principalities and Powers, the Systems of Domination, keep us under their thumb is by keeping us busy, tired, and diverted. We become numbed to the call of Jesus Christ to serve God and serve the hurting because we don't have time. We come home after work and collapse in front of the TV until it is time to go to bed and repeat the process all over again. Weekends are when we want to get out of town or do something else. So we live life to the minimum. And we say we want change when we actually want to remain the same – but we want to feel better about it.

We know that to get up and follow Jesus will involve us in people's lives in ways we're not sure we want, because to be whole means to be re-membered, re-connected with God and with God's people and God's creation. No more isolation. No more living my own private life where no one bothers me. To be whole means to get off of the couch and get involved. It means to work our tails off, often doing behind the scenes work that is tedious and overlooked. We know that to walk out of the door and say, "Here, am I Jesus! Send me!" is an invitation to maybe getting crucified like Jesus. As Dan Berrigan has said, "If you're going to follow Jesus, you had better look good on wood, because that is where you'll end up." We know all of that, so maybe our couches and our pallets don't look so bad.

No wonder so many churches are still on the pallet. No wonder so many of us are reticent about being made whole. And no wonder we have neither the courage nor the will nor the energy to say, "No!" to the many ways the Powers grind us all down. No wonder we are reluctant to say "Yes!" to Jesus Christ and the embodiment of his Abundant Life.

Well, in our story, this man has the guts to be whole. He takes a deep

breath and nods to Jesus, "Yes, I want to be whole, healed and well. I know it will take time Jesus. I know it will take work and lots of unlearning old pain-filled habits accumulated over 38 years, and learning new habits. I know it is not going to be easy, but yes, Jesus, make me a whole person."

And Jesus does. No questions asked. No stipulations. No checking to see if he is truly deserving or not. Jesus just heals him. Grace. And the man picks up his mat and walks out of the door to new life. To wholeness.

Notice what is not here. There is no request for healing in this story. The only question comes from Jesus. The man does not reach out to Jesus for help or otherwise request healing. We have no indication that the man knows Jesus to be a healer--or that he knows anything at all about Jesus except that Jesus asks personal questions of strangers. The writer of Ephesians praises God "who is able to do abundantly far more than all we can ask or imagine" (3:20). This is the God whom Jesus reveals here.