

## **“God Is with You When You’re Stuck”**

### **John 5:1-9**

Writer’s block. The glass ceiling. A fork in the road. A tire in the mud. Everyone knows what it feels like to be stuck. Stuck in a rut. Stuck at home – homebound. Stuck in a hospital bed. Stuck in a dead-end job. It’s a helpless and hopeless feeling.

Most of us can relate at one time or another in our lives. Maybe you’re at the end of your rope. You’re out of options, resources, and patience.

You’re trying to get out of a tough situation, but everything you’ve tried hasn’t worked. Or you’re stuck because you just don’t know what to do next, what action to take. Or, and this one is hard to admit, you don’t want to take action because you’ve gotten comfortable in your stuckness. It has become comfortable for you. And what would happen if you became unstuck? It might be more stressful than exciting.

In our gospel text, the man has been stuck for 38 years, unable to walk for 38 years. His circumstances seem unlikely to change. Yet this did not deter Jesus. As is the case with all his miracles, he wasn’t satisfied to simply heal the physical needs presented to him. He went straight to the heart.

Where do you find yourself today? Where do I find myself today? Are we stuck because we’re at the end of our rope? Are we stuck because we’re afraid of what healing would look like? Either way, Jesus loves us.

Jesus wants us to come to him with our problems. He wants to help us get unstuck no matter the reason we got stuck in the first place. But know that he won’t leave it there. Our God is in the business of changing and softening hearts to become more like his.

Usually, it's not an easy process. Every surgery or illness requires recovery time. Every deep wound requires stitches. But we can rest assured that when we're in the hands of the healer, physical and/or spiritual healing will happen. Even if we don't survive physically, we are eternally in His healing hands.

What area of your life do you feel stuck in today? If you're not currently stuck, can you remember a time in your life when you did feel this way?

I've chosen this healing weekend, when we invite you to come forward for healing prayers, to come clean with you about my own health.

I know most of you think I made a miraculous recovery from almost dying from Pancreatitis and several complications. Thanks to the doctors and nurses at the Cleveland Clinic, I did recover.

Now I'm talking about retiring in 2 or 3 years after I turn 65, I'm now 63 and some of you have questioned that decision because I appear to be healthy. I'm not healthy.

I've been open with you about my heart and my growing dependence on my pacemaker-defibrillator. I keep working out, but I'm becoming more – and - more short-winded. I've been on blood pressure and other medications for years.

It's the new stuff since pancreatitis and the blood clot surgery on my leg that's got me stuck. The surgeon cut through a bunch of nerves in my right leg to get to the clot in the main artery. My right leg will always be numb, especially my knee and foot where there is a sort of aching pain. I've gotten use to it. No big deal!

What's got me stuck since last September is something called polycythemia which is a blood disorder in which bone marrow is producing too many red blood cells.

It is often caused by various types of cancer but my blood/cancer doctor after many blood tests and X-rays of various sorts, can't find any cancer in me. He's guessing now it might be sleep apnea, but I've been on a night-time breathing machine for years.

I'm stuck in going for a phlebotomy every 6 weeks which is like giving a unit of blood, only my blood is thrown away. My red blood cell count comes down temporarily until my body starts over-producing again.

Am I stuck doing this for the rest of my life? I hope not. But it's a lot better than having cancer which we all hope to avoid.

I feel stuck. On June 9, I'll give thanks for the 37<sup>th</sup> anniversary of my ordination Paula is retiring at the end of this year. I tried to convince her to stay 1 more year but then I realized it would be unhealthy for Divinity to have us retire at the same time.

Divinity has been extremely blessed with an anonymous member who has donated enough money specifically to call a second pastor while I'm still serving Divinity so that there might be a year or two of overlap to help make for a smoother transition after I retire. That could be a wonderful thing for our congregation, instead of going through the normal 1- or 2-year interim between pastors.

What area of your life do you feel stuck in today? Be honest with yourself and with God. If you're not currently stuck, you can probably remember a time in your past when you did feel this way.

When you find that you're stuck in an area of your life, what are some of your strategies for getting unstuck?

It would be nice to have Jesus drop by. Jesus drops by the healing pools on the outskirts of Jerusalem. He finds a man who has been ill for 38 years, 1 year longer than I've been a pastor – a long time.

John 5:6 . . . “When Jesus saw him and knew he'd been lying there a long time, he said to him ‘Do you want to be healed?’” Do you want to be healed?

Why would Jesus ask this question? Our only clue is that he had been ill for a long time. Was Jesus asking if he had become comfortable in his illness, if he was stuck in his illness and maybe didn't really want his life to change? Do you want to be healed? Do you want your life to radically change? Do you want to become unstuck?

Instead of answering the question directly, the man responds the way a lot of us respond. We complain. We blame others for our situation.

John 5:7 . . . The sick man answered him, “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is troubled, and while I am going another steps down before me.”

Apparently, the water only heals when it gets miraculously riled up which doesn't give him enough time to get in on his own, especially when others more mobile and with more help, step in front of him. And of course, no one even offers to help him. The man has been stuck for a very long time. He hasn't even considered the possibility that he could be healed without even getting into the water.

John 5:8-9 . . . Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your pallet and walk”. And at once the man was healed, and he took up his pallet and walked.”

Most times, when we've been stuck for a long time, whether due to an illness, bad job, bad marriage, empty bank account, or other reasons, we need someone to come along and help us get unstuck.

In our Stephen Minister training we have this illustration of a mud pit (on the front of the bulletin/screen) in which someone is stuck. Whether it be the pastor, a Stephen Minister, a good friend or family member, comes along to help. The worst thing we can do is over identify with the stuck person and jump in the pit with them. Get stuck with them. Tell them one of our stories of stuckness instead of listening to their story.

It is the caregivers job to stay grounded, to keep a strong hold of the roots while empathizing with the stuck person. We use what resources we have – being a good listener, not being judgmental, prayer, making a referral, sharing Holy Communion, or whatever it might be to help the person out of their pit.

On the other hand, we may have a care receiver who does not want to be healed, who does not want to get unstuck, and who sometimes want to die, especially if they're living in a nursing home with no quality of life. Then we simply be present and spiritually walk with them. Divinity is blessed with Stephen Ministers, visitation ministers like Loretta and Lori, and so many others who live out your faith in Christ as caregivers to so many in need.

Personally, I've known for a long time that I'd get stuck with bad health in my 60's. Both of my grandfathers and my father died in their 60's. Grandpa Gunkelman from cancer. Grandpa Brant from pancreatitis. My Dad from a heart attack. Which means I've been preparing myself for a long time. When I took that walk with Jesus in June of 2020, I was ready. He wasn't.

“Do you want to be healed?” I did and I do. I hope you do too!

May the peace of God . . .

#581 – You Are Mine