In our Gospel lesson today, Jesus was approaching this pool near Jerusalem called the “*Sheep Gate*”. He encountered a paralytic man who has not walked for 38 years. Imagine that? For 38 years, rain or shine, this paralytic man showed up at the city gate begging for money and food at the mercy of bystanders. This was probably the only thing that he could do that is socially acceptable by others, because of his physical disability.

The reason why many gathered around this pool because many believed that this place has a sacred power of healing when the angel from God came down and stirred up the water from that pool. Whoever was in the pool at the time would be cured of any disease that he or she may had. So as you could imagine this place gets pretty crowded all the time….except on the Sabbath Day, because it was against the law to heal on the Sabbath Day.

But on this Sabbath day, Jesus arrived to this pool and to his amazement he saw this paraylytic man sitting by the poolside probably alone. No one would dare to come near him because he was considered spiritually uncleaned. The paralytic man was probably thinking that maybe (or just maybe) the angel would come on that day and he would be the first in line while no one else was beating him to it. Little that he knew that on this day, he would encounter more than an angel from God. He would encounter God Himself in the form of his begotten Son.

When Jesus saw this paralytic man waiting by the poolside, he had compassion towards him, asking if he wanted to walk again? Not knowing who Jesus was, the man said, *“Of course! But I have no one to help me and when I tried to make my way there, the rest of the people would always beat me to it.”* Then Jesus said to him, ***“Stand up, Take up your mat and Walk.”*** Miraculously this man took up his mat, stood up and began walking. Just remember this was all done on the Sabbath Day!

Later on, Jesus and this paralytic man met again in the Temple. The man came to learn who Jesus was and began praising him and proclaiming to everyone what Jesus has done for him, that He made him walk again.

This was quite a remarkable story of transformation that we can analyze from different angles. What was going through this seemingly hopeless paralytic man’s mind expecting to be healed on a Sabbath day? What can we learn from the model of persistence and faith as demonstrated by this paralytic man?

We may never find out for sure about these questions, but one thing we do know is that **God can and does heal on the Sabbath Day if God chooses to**. Miracles are happening all around us even as we speak. Observing the Sabbath does not mean to that we would “sleep in, sit back, relax and do nothing”, that’s not what observing Sabbath is about! It means that we take “time out” from the rigors and busyness of life and rededicate our lives to worship and to honor God, anticipating for what God has done and is about to do. Afterall, **sabbath is not about US, but instead it’s about God and God alone.**

Similarly in our other reading from the Book of Acts, the Apostle Paul encountered a Gentile woman by the name of Lydia, who was a worshiper of God and a “dealer of purple cloth”.[[1]](#footnote-1) We know very little about who Lydia was. Based on what we do know, Lydia who had no husband was probably a wealthy business person because purple cloth was an expensive fabric. And in those days, a woman who’s not married to a husband had no social standing whatsoever. So like the paralytic man, Lydia was resilient and determined of her faith in her quest for God.

Paul’s encounter with Lydia was a divine providence in an unexpected combination of time, place and people….on the Sabbath day, outside of the city gate by the riverside. Do you see the parallel between Lydia and the paralytic man? Both did not quite fit into the “ideal” profile, but nevertheless God still used them in a mighty way to further the gospel and to testify what God has done in their lives.

Much like Jesus’s encounter with the paralytic man by the poolside, there were major social and cultural barriers that Paul and Lydia needed to overcome. It was the Holy Spirit that brought Jesus to the paralytic man, and Lydia to Paul so that the gospel may be advanced and others were baptized. The paralytic man declared his faith and proclaimed God’s miracle upon him to others. Lydia went on to become a fervant supporter and patron of Paul’s ministry in Phillippi.

**Lydia went against all social and cultural barriers by making herself available and useful for God’s purpose and mission to the world.** She came to see her own God given potential and a seed of faith that was planted in her.

Through theses two stories of the paralytic man and Lydia, we can lift up a couple of important themes here:

1. **Don’t under-estimate the power of God. Don’t let earthly problems and physical hardships weigh your down or cause you to lose sight of God’s hope in your life.** God can and will use EACH and EVERYONE of us, regardless of our abilities, talents, educational levels, and skills that we may bring. God will take whatever we are willing to offer of ourselves. When God calls us to ***“Stand up, Take you mat, and Walk”.*** God may challenge us to swimming against the current, against the social norms like the paralyzed man and Lydia.

**2) Be humble before the LORD and listen to what God has to say**

It was easy for Jesus to command someone to stand up, take up the mat and walk, but it was even harder for someone to acknowledge their wrongs, repent and change from his/her own rebellious and sinful ways. Our human hearts have been bitter and hardened and are in need of God’s grace to forgive. Instead of pointing our fingers and focusing on the wrongs of others, we need to examine and search our own hearts through our confession before God and seek God’s forgiveness and mercy.

Later on, we will once again cherish a moment of solitude and grace to be in God’s presence through the celebration of the Holy Communion. God has invited us all to this table as a sign of love and redemption, through the sacrificial body and the blood of Christ. This is not a ritual of us “going through the motion” but rather **God’s invitation for us to STOP and examine our hearts…. as we Reflect, Rethink and Renew our relationship with God.** What is preventing us from seeing what God sees? Are we willing to receive God’s new hope and new vision in our lives? When we find ourselves running on empty in the spiritual well, the Spirit will lead us to God’s well of healing and grace, so that we may be healed, replenished, and recharged, even on the Sabbath Day?

Everytime we come before this table, we proclaim that we are in need of God’s strengths in spite of our human weaknesses and shortcomings. We yearn for God’s love and forgiveness when we have been deprived of our own human love or when we’ve simply forgotten how to extend love others. This table of grace is where God’s greatest miracles and transformations are about to take place.

So “***Stand up, Take up our mat and Walk***”. **God’s mercy triumphs over all of our challenges in life, no matter how desperate or gloomy they may be.** **God’s justice calls for us to stand up against the social norms of this world and challenges us to be prophetic witnesses to God’s love to all of God’s people.**

This is our calling and God’s Hope and Grace for the world today the light of the risen Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit into this world. Thanks be to God. In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit, Amen.

1. *Acts 16:14* [↑](#footnote-ref-1)