In the Gospel lesson that we just read, Jesus and his disciples were coming through the city of Jerusalem through the northern gate known as the Sheep Gate. There he encountered a paralytic man who had not walked for more than 38 years. That’s right, 38 years…Imagine that? This paralytic man was just lying there by the poolside. We’re not sure if he was paralyzed since birth or became paralyzed later on. But to keep things in perspective, the average life span for an adult male at that time was only around 40 years. So it was remarkable and a miracle itself that this man had lived up to this age despite his physical disability.

For 38 years, rain or shine, this paralytic man showed up at the city gate begging for money or food at the mercy of any bystanders or worshippers who were on their way to the temple. He was a regular there. Most people would simply just pass him by. Sadly this was probably the only thing that he would be allowed to do, as he was being ostracized by his own community.

The reason why so many people would gather around this pool was because many believe this place possess a sacred power of healing. Whenever the angel of God came down from heaven and stirred up the water from that pool, whoever was in the pool at the time would be cured of any diseases or forms of disabilities that he or she may had. So as you could imagine this place gets pretty crowded all the time, but with one exception…on the Sabbath Day! Because many knew that it was forbidden to heal on the Sabbath Day, even the angel of God would take a day-off on the Sabbath. Well, that was about to be changed!

On this Sabbath day, Jesus and his disciples arrived to this pool and to his amazement he saw this paraylytic man sitting by the poolside all alone. No one would dare to come near him because he was considered spiritually uncleaned. Whoever touches him would become unclean himself. The paralytic man perhaps was hoping that he could be the first one in line to the pool when the angel comes down and stirs the pool tomorrow. Little that he knew that on this day…the day of Sabbath, he would encounter more than just an angel from God. He would encounter God Himself in the person of Jesus. How cool is that?

When Jesus saw this paralytic man by the poolside, immediately he expressed sympathy towards him, asking if he wanted to walk again? Well, that was kind of a rhetorical question, don’t you think? Of course he wanted to walk again….but the question is “HOW?” The paralytic man then replied to Jesus “*I have no one to help put me into the pool and everytime I tried to make my way there, others would always beat me to it.”* Then Jesus said to him, ***“Stand up, Take up your mat and Walk!”*** Miraculously this man took Jesus’ advice and stood up, took up his mat, and began to walk. The crowd and other bystanders were astonished. Keep in mind that all this took place on the Sabbath Day! Then later on, this paralytic man met Jesus once again in the Temple, perhaps he wanted to come to the temple to offer his gratitude and thanks for his healing. By now, the paralytic man had learned about who Jesus was, so he began praising him and started telling everyone what Jesus had done to him, now that he’s healed.

This was quite a remarkable story of transformation and miracle. We can analyze it from so many different angles. What was going through this hopeless paralytic man’s mind expecting to be healed on a Sabbath day? What about the persistence of faith that he demonstrated? Or how about from our society’s point of view that no one would come to his aid They all passed him by and shooed him away. What should our response be when we see such system of injustice occurring?

Well, these are all valid questions that we don’t have an easy solution or anwser for. But one thing we do know for sure is that **God can and does heal on the Sabbath Day if God chooses to**. God can do what God ultimately decides to do, whenever and wherever for the sake of mercy and compassion to the people. We should never, never ever under-estimate the power and the timing of God’s mercy. Miracles are happening all around us even as we speak.

Incidentally I’m sure many of you have probably heard of the unfortunate event that happened earlier this week when a giant tree branch fell on top of a 55 year old tourist woman from VA in Washington Square Park. The victim happened to be a sister of my friend who works in our national denomination headquarter office in Louisville. I don’t know the victim herself but I only know her brother. Despite having a fractured skull and spine, remarkably and miraculously, barring any setbacks, she could be released sometime this week from the hospital here in NY and be transferred to a VA facility where she would continue her rehab in the coming weeks. The medical staff are confident that she would be able to make a full recovery, despite the initial worst fear of being paralyzed for the rest of her life or even death.

On a beautiful summer evening, indeed a miracle had occurred by the fountain at Washington Square Park. The angel of God came down to rescue her and protected her through this horrific ordeal. Her courage and bravery was truly inspirational, as we pray for Penny’s full and speedy recovery in the coming weeks and even months ahead.

In our other text that we read earlier from the *Book of Acts*, we also came across another woman who went through a miracle of her own and inspired others through her benevolence. The Apostle Paul encountered a Gentile woman by the name of Lydia, who was a worshiper of God. We know very little about who Lydia was, except that she was a “dealer of purple cloth” [[1]](#footnote-1) and the head of her household. There was no mentioning of her husband whatsoever, perhaps he had died or she was never married. We don’t know. As it turned out, Lydia was also a major benefactor and a generous financial supporter of Paul and Silas’s ministry and of the early church. Like the paralytic man, Lydia was a trailblazer and a pioneer who had a big heart for God’s ministry. She inspired others I’m sure, especially among other women.

Paul’s encounter with Lydia was a divine providence in an unexpected time, place…ironically on the Sabbath day, “outside of the city gate” by the riverside. Paul and his disciples took huge risk and a giant leap of faith by symbolically going outside of their boundaries or their “comfort zone”. They went “outside” of the city gate where they came face-to-face across those who were searching for their own faith and those who were looking in from the outside, many of them were women and Gentiles. **Paul not only preach to men who were gathered in the synagogue, but also to women who were gathered by the riverside and on the fringe of society.** Paul’s welcome and acceptance allowed new converts like Lydia to cross over into salvation.

Even though both Lydia and the paralytic man did not quite fit into the “ideal” profile description to be the followers and believers of Jesus, nevertheless they made themselves available for God’s use. Their lives may not have been perfect but now they have been transformed because of their faith…and they wanted others to know about what God has done miraculously in their lives.

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. Do not let your physical hardships and challenges weigh you down or cause you to lose sight of God’s on-going work of miracle in your life.** God can and will use EACH and EVERYONE of us, regardless of our abilities, talents, educations, and skills that we may bring. God will take whatever we are willing to offer of ourselves and to do great things for the kingdom of God.
2. **The Gospel is inclusive and transformative!** It reaches beyond all economic, religious, gender, and social boundaries in order to create a beloved new community of faith, as we’ve read today through the story of Lydia and the paralytic man who were denied access to social advancement and the healing water. Both of these stories also challenged us to examine our approach towards “outsiders” and “foreigners” within and beyond our community, our city and our country. As we’ve seen today, the Spirit grants us the power to overcome some of these hurdles and fears and enables us to take steps beyond our comfort zones. Trust that the Spirit will work among us so that we may welcome others and take part of their life transformation process and miracle as well.

The passage in Acts encourages us to cross over into unfamiliar territorities, to open our city gates, to seek new places of prayer and worship, and to do this without reservation and hestitation, because success or failture is not our responsibility but God’s. Ultimately we’re not the ones who do the work of convertion; we simply need to cross boundaries with open arms.[[2]](#footnote-2) May we be the ones who would exercise our compassion and mercy, to help others to invite them into the pool of baptism, where they may receive new life once again.

Everytime we come before the baptismal fount, as we have witnessed last Sunday, 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 forgotten how to extend love and compassion towards others. This table of grace and the fountain of salvation are set before us, in order that God’s greatest miracles and transformations may take hold.

So let us “***Stand up, Take up our mat and Walk***”. **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, in light of the risen Christ and the leading of the Holy Spirit into this world. Let us respond accordingly through our faith and our walk. 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)
2. Blickenstaff, Marianne *Connections, Year C, Volume 2* P.270 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)