

BELPRES CHURCH

Sermon Title: Unstuck

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Scripture:

John 5:1-9a

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. ² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. ⁵ One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

⁷ “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

⁸ Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” ⁹ At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

Transcript:

Well, good morning.

Good morning.

Good morning Bel Pres. My name's Annie Duncan, I'm the executive pastor here, and it is so great to be with you in worship. And welcome to those of you who are worshipping online too. The scripture this morning comes from John chapter five. "Sometime later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate, a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. And here a great number of disabled people used to lie. The blind, the lame, the paralyzed. And one who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that

he had been in this condition for a long time, He asked him, "Do you want to get well?" "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred.

While I'm trying to get in someone else goes down ahead of me." Then Jesus said to him, "Get up. Pick up your mat and walk." And at once the man was cured and he picked up his mat and walked." So Belle Pres, we are in a sermon series right now called Storytellers, where we take a look at people in the Bible and how Jesus changed their life. He stepped into their story and he gave them a new story to tell. And as we walk through this passage in John together, I encourage you to ask yourselves the question, "How has Jesus changed my life? How has Jesus stepped into my story?" Because if we're following Jesus, if you're following Jesus, you are connected to a greater story and that's God's story. Which is good news. And maybe you can answer that question, "How has Jesus changed my life?"

Maybe you could answer that easily or maybe that leaves you wondering, "I'm not sure." And that's okay. In a couple weeks we are going to talk about how we can tell our own stories. But the reason stories are important is because they're relatable. That's why Jesus told so many stories. We see Him do this all over in scripture. And when we remember and tell our stories, not just the really big ones, but maybe some of the more vulnerable ones, it helps others in their stories. It helps others be connected to how God might offer them hope too. Simply put, stories matter. So what is this man's story that we encounter here in John five? We don't know a lot about this man except for what is written in scripture. We don't know his name. We don't know how old he is. We don't know where he's from, but we do know that he's been an invalid for 38 years.

That's a word we don't really use a lot, but we can gather that he's paralyzed. And that's a long time to be paralyzed. 38 years. And we can gather that this disability, being paralyzed meant that he couldn't use his legs because when Jesus inquires of the man, "Do you want to get well?" He replies with, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred, when I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." So because his legs are paralyzed, he needs help getting into the water when it's stirred. And what's all this stirring in the waters? What is that about, right? Well, in this pool, Bethesda, beneath the pool, there was a subterranean stream, which every now and then would bubble up, and the waters would stir. And there was a belief back then that the bubbling and stirring was caused by an angel. And that the first person to get in the water after the waters had been stirred, they might get healed with whatever was ailing them.

And this seems like a silly superstition to us so many years later. But once word got out that you could maybe get healed from these bubbling waters, people flocked to this pool for the chance that they might get healed too. But we see this man, right? This man who's been paralyzed for 38 years, these bubbling waters haven't been successful for him. And when he's introduced to us in John chapter five, we find him literally and metaphorically stuck. He's literally stuck because his legs are paralyzed, and they prevent him from getting in the pool without asking for help. And he's metaphorically stuck because he thinks that this is how he is going to get well. He is putting a lot of hope here in these superstitious, stirring waters. And you can almost hear it in

the tone of voice that he gives to Jesus when Jesus asks him, "Do you want to get well." Another translation might put it this way.

"Are you crazy, Jesus? Of course I want to get well. I've been living like this forever. Don't you see that my legs don't work. Others push themselves in front of me and they get in the water first. It's really unfair." So yes, this man is stuck. And after 38 years, he's maybe lost some hope, right, of getting well. But here's the thing about getting stuck. When we get stuck, Jesus offers us ways to get unstuck. And while this story in my Bible, in the NIV, it's called healing at the pool. It is about a physical healing, but it's also about so much more that Jesus is doing in this man's life, which we're going to get to. Jesus sees this man, He sees him stuck living a certain way and He enters in. And this story isn't so much about him being able to walk again, as it is about Jesus giving this man a new story.

My grandpa Harvey, he was confined to his wheelchair for the last 10 years of his life. Which he immediately upgraded to a motorized scooter because it was faster. And in the small town in Iowa where he lived, you could find him scootering everywhere. Everywhere. I mean, he was well-known in his small town in Iowa. And his favorite spot to scooter to was from his retirement facility to a place called Justice For All. Justice For All was a service and learning center that had ties to Dr. John Perkins in Mississippi and his work in ministry there. And my grandpa Harvey, he loved, as often as he could to go and volunteer at Justice For All because he loved Dr. Perkins. He loved volunteering. He just loved being around people. So almost daily, my grandpa, in his late 70s would scooter down a busy highway to go to volunteer at Justice For All.

And they nicknamed that highway, Harvey's highway, because he would always wave at cars whether he knew them or not. And because he totaled his scooter on that highway, not once but twice. We were constantly having to buy the man a new scooter. He was a little bit of a rebel. So my grandpa, he was like the man in John five in that he was stuck. He like the man in John five. He couldn't use his legs, he was stuck in his scooter. But my grandpa, unlike the man in John five, wasn't stuck because that didn't stop him from having hope, from still living his life. He still saw his story connected to God's story and he saw that God was calling him to serve as often as he could. And for him that meant at Justice For All. There are times in our lives where we might give up hope, but Jesus doesn't give up on us.

Jesus never gives up. And here's the thing. When we're stuck, Jesus offers us ways to get unstuck. And we're going to walk through three ways that we see how Jesus does this in John chapter five. And the first is this, Jesus makes the first move. The scripture in John five, it opens with saying, "Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals." There's a few Jewish festivals and feasts throughout the calendar year, there's Pentecost, Passover and the Feast of Tabernacles. And every adult male Jew that lived within a 15-mile radius, they were required to go to these festivals. So Jesus is a Jew and he's going to Jerusalem because he's in the area. So in verse one of John five, it says, "Jesus went to Jerusalem for the festival." But we don't find

Jesus going to like a bougie palace. We don't find him going to the massive crowds where the celebrations would've been.

Where do we find Jesus? Visiting the place in the city, not with the greatest appeal, but with the greatest need. He goes to this pool, right? The man in John five, he doesn't have to go searching for Jesus. Jesus makes the first move. Jesus goes searching for him. And Jesus arrives at the pool and He sees so many people there, that are hurting. And in verses five and six, it says, "One who was there had been an invalid for 38 years." And when Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he'd been in this condition for so long, He asked him, "Do you want to get well?" Jesus goes to the man whose condition there is probably the most severe of all the people gathered, and he has compassion on him. He sees him, He sees his despair, He sees his pain and he asks him, "Do you want to get well?"

Jesus doesn't ask the man, "Do you want help getting into the water? Do you want Me to help others clear the way?" Jesus doesn't ask the man if he has faith that he'll get healed. He just asks him a simple question of, "Do you want to get well?" Jesus makes the first move. And we see Jesus do this all over scripture. How Jesus initiates. Jesus makes the first move. He engages with us. And maybe you're wondering where, Pastor Annie, where do we see this in scripture? Or maybe you're new to reading the Bible, which is great. And so you have no idea where to look in scripture. And if you're new to reading the Bible, I always tell people, start with John. Start with the book of John. And so in just the first five chapters of John, we see Jesus initiate and make the first move in a few different ways.

In John 1:14, it says, "The word became flesh and made his dwelling among us." Jesus came to be with us. Emanuel, God with us. He moved into the neighborhood. He makes the first move. And in John 1:43 it says, "Finding Philip, Jesus said to him, 'Follow me.'" Jesus found his disciples. He called them my name. They weren't searching for him. He makes the first move. And in John 4:7, when a Samaritan woman came to draw water, Jesus said to her, "Will you give me a drink?" Jesus initiates conversation. He makes the first move with this woman. And in that conversation, he confronts her sin and changes her life forever. And then in John five, we see him with our guy, at the pool, where Jesus makes the first move with him. And I love this about Jesus. I love this, because Jesus doesn't wait for us to recognize our need for Him.

He comes searching after us. He makes the first move. So how have you seen this in your life? How has Jesus made a first move with you? Because more often than not, Jesus doesn't just make one first move, but he initiates with us over and over again. And Jesus does this in really big ways like with the man at the pool where he gets physically healed. But he also does this in our everyday ordinary events. Like this story I'm about to share about watching football. So this past fall on a Saturday night, I was doing what I normally do on Saturday nights. I was watching Udub football. Go Ducks. Good, I'm glad that there's some Huskies here. Hopefully there's no organ Ducks though because on this particular Saturday night, the Huskies were playing the Ducks. And if you remember this past Falls game, it was an epic game.

It was an epic game where we were at Autzen Stadium in Eugene and the Huskies pull out a mighty victory. And the game had gone back and forth a few times. And during football games, I use words that I would never use in a sermon. You'll never hear them here. But when I watch football sometimes, oops, they come out. And especially when the moments get a little heated like at the end of the game when it seemed like the Ducks were cheating, I got so heated that I actually posted something on social media on my Instagram story that said, "Cheaters don't win." And they didn't. They didn't win. But this is just another typical Saturday night in the Duncan household. And with the sweet taste of victory, I was still glowing from the win. I fall fast asleep to prepare for Sunday the next day. And I fell fast asleep.

But then at 03:00 AM, I abruptly got woken up to this question. Or not question, more a statement, "Annie, even when you're watching Udub football, I want you to follow me." And I was like, that wasn't what I thought was waking me up in the middle of the night, right? Belle Pres, for 41 years I've been watching Udub football and I did not know that I was stuck. But Jesus woke me up in the middle of the night and showed me that I was a little bit stuck. Because here I thought it was completely fine and normal to bash Udub opponents when we were playing them and use words I'd never use in a sermon because, who's going to know? You guys aren't there with me on a Saturday night? But here's the thing, even though this is a silly example. At Belle Pres when we're talking about becoming disciples, that means we're becoming more like Jesus.

And at 03:00 AM Jesus woke me up to say, not to fill me with guilt and conviction, but to literally invite me and say, "Annie, even in this part of your life, I want you to follow me." And I don't know why Jesus waited 41 years to convict me on my Udub football watching, but probably because he was convicting me on a bunch of other things because it's just, it goes on right? God is constantly engaging us and saying, "Okay, even in this part, will you surrender this part to me too?" So it was really powerful. And the next morning I took my Instagram story down and I've been telling people this story ever since because it just, for some reason, it reiterated so powerfully to me how Jesus wants all of us. And that's a good thing. There's freedom in that. It's a good thing. So the next time Udub plays Oregon is on October 14, and all of you have permission to ask me about my behavior the next day on Sunday. Go Dogs. I can't quite say go Oregon, but maybe I can in a year, I don't know.

Whatever it is, Belle Pres that you might find yourselves stuck in, whether it's something you know you're stuck in, like the man at the pool. Or it's something you don't know you're stuck in like my previous 41 years of watching football. Look for ways that Jesus might be speaking to you, engaging you, and nudging you. Look for ways that Jesus might be taking the first move. Because in that first move, it gives us a different perspective. And that's the second thing. When we're stuck, Jesus offers us ways to get unstuck by first making the first move and second, showing us a new perspective. With the man at the pool his singular perspective is that he thinks he needs to get into the water in order to get well. And that man doesn't need a better

perspective, he actually needs a new perspective. And in week one, pastor Scott in this sermon series, he said, "Jesus doesn't want to make you better. He wants to make you new."

For the man at the pool, Jesus didn't come to give him a better strategy or a better perspective on how he can get healed and get in the water. Jesus came to give him a new perspective. Now, I'm sure many of us have heard this a few times already, but one of the first things that Damar Hamlin said, after regaining consciousness after a very rare and life-threatening injury in the Bills and Bengals game a couple weeks ago, the very first thing that he said was, "Did we win the game?" Did we win the game? That's one perspective, right? The doctors gave him a completely different perspective when they answered, "Yes, you won. You won the game of life." Damar had no idea that that game will never be finished, but the game of life, that's the perspective that the doctors were telling him about.

In verse seven, the man at the pool said, "I have no one to help me. I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I'm trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me." The man's perspective is he's looking for someone, a human being to help him in his situation. That's him being stuck in a singular perspective. Because no human is going to save this man from the condition that he is in. And for many areas in our lives, I think we look to each other before we look to Jesus and see that Jesus is right there. He's right there. He's been standing there the whole time. So when Jesus asks the man at the pool, "Do you want to get well?" Another way that Jesus could have put this is, "Do you really want to get well?"

Do you really want to get changed? Or are you pretty comfortable just sitting by the pool all day and using the excuse that you don't have anybody to help you get in the water? Sometimes I think when we're stuck, we are comfortably stuck. Like, don't bother me. I'm actually okay right here, sunbathing in the sun. But Jesus doesn't want us to stay stuck, which is why He's constantly pursuing us. He's making the first move and He's showing us a new perspective. No human could have helped that man. What he needed was a savior, and that's who came to him. That's who made the first move. That's who showed him a new perspective. But the reason that Jesus comes and makes the first move and shows us a new perspective isn't just for the sake of something new. Jesus comes to help us tell a new story.

So when we're stuck, Jesus offers us ways to get unstuck by making a first move, by offering a new perspective. And third gives us a new story to tell. Take a second and think about this man. This man by the pool. He's probably all alone, right? He is. The story he'd been telling himself is one of despair, one of pain, one of hurt, one of isolation. People had probably taken advantage of him there at the pool, but also in many other areas of his life. And he's given up hope. That's the story that this man is telling. But when Jesus shows up, makes a first move and shows him a new perspective, He gives him a new story to tell. And this man, he either doesn't recognize Jesus and the healing power that Jesus is capable of, or he's so stuck that he doesn't think that Jesus can actually help.

Have you ever been so stuck that you thought, "Jesus can't actually speak to this part of my life." Regardless though, for this man, in a miraculous flash of a moment, Jesus does for the man what the pool had failed to do for 38 years. And He heals the man, with the simple command that comes from Jesus. Jesus says, "Get up. Pick up your mat and walk. And at once the man was cured, he picked up his mat and he walked." And there's so much in these verses that I just want to know more. Because the man had just said to Jesus, "The reason I can't get well is because I got no one to help me get in the water. They all get in ahead of me." And the very next thing that Jesus says is, "Get up. Pick up your mat and walk."

The man could have complained again. He could have given another excuse. But what happened? Did the muscles that had been weakened after 38 years, did they automatically get strong? Did the man hear Jesus authority? And it was so powerful that the man was like, "Whoa, I see the exclamation point there. I'm picking up my mat. I'm going, Jesus. I'm going." Like, what happened? There's so much here that we just don't know. But we do know that the man was healed after 38 years. He was healed, and he walked. And I love how Jesus tells him to pick up his mat. That's such an interesting detail in this story. But the mat that had carried the man for 38 years, the man was now carrying. Like, whew. That gets me a little emotional. It's as if Jesus is wanting to reiterate to this man, the thing that once conquered you, you can now conquer.

And that's a word for us today too. The things that have conquered us in our lives, we can conquer because of the power that we have in Jesus. And then just a few hours later, literally this man has been walking, hasn't walked for 38 years, and just a few hours later, some Jewish authorities, they question him. They stop him because he's carrying a mat and it's the Sabbath, and that's forbidden. You're not supposed to do that on the Sabbath. So they're like, "What are you doing? Why are you carrying the mat?" And this man who has a new story to tell now, he gets to testify to this new story. And he says, "The man who made me well said, 'Pick up your mat and walk'." Jesus invites this man into belief. And that's where his new story begins. And later on, the man encounters Jesus again.

He learns that it's Jesus that healed him. And then that's all we know about this man. We don't know the more of the story that he got to tell, but we do know that Jesus changed his story and gave him a new story. And that's what Jesus does with us. Jesus gives us many, many stories to tell. And if you believe and follow Jesus, your story isn't just an individual story, but it's connected to God's story of love, of healing, and hope. So this week, look for Jesus making a move with you. Maybe it's a first move. Maybe it's a hundredth move. Look for how Jesus might be pursuing you. And don't be passive about it. Be active. Be looking for it. Be listening. Be paying attention to how Jesus might be trying to get your attention. And there's a lot of football going on these next few weeks, so maybe your call is to be like me and just simply try and be a disciple when you watch football.

It's hard, right? It's hard. But like the man at the pool that has a first encounter with Jesus, look for how Jesus might be encountering you. And believe that you too, like the man at the pool can

step away from the pool. You can step away from the things that maybe have been comfortable in the past that Jesus might be calling you out of. And Jesus gives us all a new story. So God, we thank you for that word. We thank you for your words of hope. We thank you that you see us. You see us right where we're at, and You speak to the heart of that. So God, even in this moment right here with people gathered here in this room and people gathered online, God, would you speak to the heart of whatever it is that You want to get our attention on? And God, we pray that we have the heart and ears to listen and respond. It's in Your name that we pray. Amen.

Discussion Questions:

Read this week's scripture(s) & answer the below questions with your friends, family, or All In small group.

Opening Question: Looking back, were you able to apply any of the things we talked about last time to your life this week? What did you do? How did it go?

Scripture Reflection Questions: Read this week's scripture together and discuss the following:

- What do we learn about God (e.g., traits, personality, what matters, priorities) in this passage?
- What do we learn about people, and ourselves in particular, this week?

Sermon Reflection Questions: Reflecting on this week's sermon, discuss the following:

- Think about a time in your life where you felt stuck. What did you do about it? The man in John 5 was also stuck – literally and metaphorically. What was he doing about that? How did Jesus meet him in that? How has Jesus met you in moments where you've felt stuck?
- Why do you think Jesus asks the man if he wants to get well? Isn't that an obvious question? Why is this question important/necessary?

Closing Question and Application: Given what we've discussed together today, how might God want you to apply these learnings to your life or in the life of your community this next week? Who might you share this with?

Closing group prayer: Spend a few minutes together in your group sharing prayer requests and then praying together for each other. Thank God for the time together, the conversation shared, the other people in the group, and for encouragement in the week ahead.