



January 9, 2011
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Move to Love: Everyone Out of the Pool! John 5: 1-15

You don't have to be much of a football fan to appreciate that this has been an incredible weekend for Washington state football. First of all, Eastern pulls off one of the greatest comebacks in college playoff history. Then those Seahawks! What was the highpoint of a game filled with highpoints? Marshawn Lynch's run. I think that was the greatest run I have ever seen. How many tackles did he break? And that stiff arm! Awesome. But maybe the most impressive thing to me was how, even when he appeared to have lost all forward motion, he didn't stop running. He just kept pumping those legs all the way into the end zone.

It was a great day for Seahawk's fans and a wonderful gift to my sermon. Because this morning we begin a three-week sermon series: *Move to Love*. We are going to look at three great Bible stories that will give us courage to take the next steps forward in our own lives even when our circumstances are doing everything they can to pull us to the ground. This morning's story is one of my favorites. It isn't an unusual healing story; we see many of these throughout Jesus' ministry. But there is a part to this story that is unique. See if you can spot it.

Next November a bunch of you will get on a plane with Cyndi and me and head to Israel for a Thanksgiving pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Half of our time we will stay in Jerusalem and, for those who want an extra treat, you will join me for sunrise walks through the deserted streets of the Old City. And one of my favorite sites that I will show you is this: Do you recognize this it? You should. You just heard it described in our story. This is the Pool of Bethesda. Five covered porches next to two pools. And it was exactly here... on one of those porches, that today's story occurred.

The pool of Bethesda was believed to have magical powers. Once in a while the waters would bubble. The myth was that an angel stirred the waters and the first person into the pool after it was stirred would be healed. Naturally, the porches were covered with scads infirm and diseased people waiting for the waters to bubble... hoping to get their healing. Some had been there a long time. They staked out their spot and begged to survive. They knew everybody on the porches. Everybody knew them. It was kind of like the bar on *Cheers*. A place where everybody knows your name. They all sat and waited...waited for their life to get better.

One day Jesus was in Jerusalem for a festival... probably Passover. The Pool of Bethesda was a few hundred yards away from the temple. Jesus intentionally made his way to this pool, and when He did, one man caught his attention.

I asked you to look for the unique facet to this healing story. Did you find it? Verse 6. Jesus' question to the man: "Do you want to get well?" I count 17 healing miracles in the gospels. Never does Jesus ask the question, "**Do you want to get well?**" He asked others. "**Do you believe that I am able to do this?**" "**Want do you want me to do for you?**" But he never asked the question, "**Do you want to get well?**" Only here.

How would you respond? I wonder if the man was tempted to say something like, "**That is the stupidest question I have ever heard!** Of **course** I want to get well. Why do you think I'm stuck by this pool with all these sick people? Do you know how long I've been sitting here? (**How long???**) 38 years! All my adult life I have been sitting here waiting for my chance to get better. Why **would** I be here unless I wanted to get well? Sheesh! I don't know who you are fella, but you obviously aren't very bright!"

That **might** have been his response to Jesus. And who could blame him? It was obvious, wasn't it? Of course he wanted to get better. Who wouldn't want to get better? Everyone wants to get better... right?

Is that right? Is it true that everyone wants to get better? Do you? Do you know anyone who doesn't? Who responds like this man? Notice he doesn't even answer Jesus' question. What does he do? **He whines!** "When the angel stirs the waters some young whippersnapper always gets down to them before me. It's someone else's fault that I don't get better! I'm a victim."

I am going to talk about Mr. Victim on Wednesday night. But for now, just notice that the guy **never** answers Jesus' question. He never says, "Yes... I want to get well." Instead, he whines. And blames. But Jesus in his grace gives him a second chance. Not with a question. With a command. What does he order him to do? "**Get up! Pick up your mat and walk!**" In other words, Jesus says, "If you want to get better...if you want to be healed... move right now! Don't sit there... move!" And it was here... right in this moment... that the man made the decision that would change the rest of his life. **He got up.** He **moved**, and he discovered that Jesus **had** healed him. For the first time in his life, he **could** move. After 38 years on that porch, he got up, rolled up his mat, made a space for someone else, and walked away on his own two legs.

Now, again...we might be tempted to say, "Well, of course he got up! This was exactly what he had been waiting for. His healing! His legs...working! Of course he was ready to get out of that pool." Right? **Not so fast.** The fact is... there are millions of Americans who don't get better... who don't get healed... who don't get their lives turned around because they cannot stand the thought of getting out of the pool. That pool has become their identity! They are Pool-Dwellers. Everything they know... everything that seems safe and familiar...is right there... right there on the porch... right there in the pool. If you offer them the choice between **familiar dysfunction**

and unfamiliar health... the majority of Americans will choose their familiar dysfunction every time.

You know, it's a law of physics. Here's the definition of this law; you tell me its name: **"The tendency of an object at rest to remain at rest unless it is acted upon by a force."** What is that called? Inertia! Do you recognize this rock? He was my helper during the Christmas Eve family services. Newton's first law of motion says that this rock is going to stay right here... until something causes it to move. [Tip it over; it falls to the carpet.] Like that. That's the law of inertia. It is true in physics.

It is also true in life. [Replace rock] When it comes to doing the things necessary to heal, to change, to get better...most people are like this. [Look at rock] Stuck. Paralyzed. Locked into a certain set of behaviors and relationships. Pool-dwellers!

Why is that? Why does inertia set in? Why do Pool-Dwellers prefer to stay in the pool? Because...it feels safe! **Familiar dysfunction always feels safer than unfamiliar health.** Always. And in fact, it's not just a feeling. **It is true.** If you dare to climb out of the pool...if you dare to move towards health and wholeness in your life, with your friends, your marriage, your relationship, your kids, your crazy boss...it is risky. It can be dangerous. Because you aren't just disrupting your familiar dysfunction. You are disrupting the familiar dysfunction of everyone who is sitting around you on that porch.

Think about it. You know that the friends you hang out with are bad for you. Their lifestyle choices, their partying, their lousy study habits or work habits...are a bad influence on you. You know that you would do better if you got out of that pool. Challenged some of their destructive behavior. Chose to live your life with more discipline. Or... gasp! ...found some new friends that aren't so toxic. **But you are like Rocky here.** Stuck! Better familiar dysfunction than unfamiliar health, right? Inertia!

Your mom is an alcoholic. You know she is killing herself and poisoning the lives of those around her. But for you to intervene... for you to climb out of the pool... means that things are going to get worse before they might get better. And there are no guarantees! If you tell her the truth, she might hate you for it and tell all who will listen what a hurtful child you are. There is a chance that your relationship will be permanently wounded. But if you don't climb out the pool, it is a certainty that your safe, crazy, dysfunctional relationship will keep her trapped in a lifestyle that **will** destroy her and **will** certainly wound those around her. Better familiar dysfunction than unfamiliar health, right? Inertia!

When things are broken, it often feels like the most loving thing is to remain paralyzed. To not stir up any more trouble. But the truth is, when things are broken, the most loving thing to do is move! Sometimes you have to move to love. Move toward something unfamiliar, less safe, but in the end, so much healthier, so much more life-giving...**if only you have the courage to overcome inertia.** If only you have the courage to move.

How about your marriage? The truth is you've been sitting on the misery porch for 38 years...or 13 years...or 3 years. This is nothing like you expected...nothing like you dreamed of. You don't talk; you don't enjoy each other; you hardly ever touch each other any more. Your marriage is a mess. Or **maybe** it's just lifeless. **But at least it is predictably lifeless.** At least it is a familiar mess. You've learned how to navigate through it. Maybe you even enjoy feeling superior to your spouse who is a jerk or insensitive or always wants more of something that you can't give.

And besides, the movement you need to take to make it better ...will be so unsettling, so disruptive, so frightening...that you think you'd rather stay in the pool. **But what might it look like if you dared to move?** Loved enough to move? I would like you to hear from a brave couple who took that exact risk. Welcome Dave and De Anna Western.

(De Anna) *David and I met yesterday, twelve years ago. Like most couples, for the first two years, this feeling of new love was fun and exciting as we grew to know each other. However, again, like many couples, the honeymoon period ended and reality set in. I felt myself slipping from being number one in David's life to being somewhere down the list. I tried everything I could think of to win back his attention but it seemed the harder I tried, the more he withdrew. The more he withdrew, the more I complained, and the frequent arguments started.*

It felt like David was an apartment with many rooms and I wasn't allowed to see into any of them except the one that I was in. Occasionally, I'd get a glimpse into some of the other rooms and discover secrets that he had been keeping from me. I became resentful because he was shutting me out, and I began to feel unimportant and used. I did everything I knew to try and make him happy. How could he lie to me like this? How could I ever trust him?

Seventeen months ago, I was at the end of my rope. I contemplated walking away from our marriage. I believed that there was no hope for us. We went to church, we went to counseling, we went to Couple's Life every year, but nothing made any difference that lasted.

(David) *It's hard for a man to hear those words from his wife, but those words today are a source of encouragement and a blessing for me and for us. I had a real problem with dishonesty and couldn't deal with the realities of life. I kept secrets so that the people around me wouldn't know that the "real me" was hurting and lonely inside. I couldn't trust myself, let alone trust my wife or God with my feelings. I feared that I would lose her if she ever knew who I really was.*

That day seventeen months ago when De Anna told me she wasn't sure if we could move beyond the damage that had occurred in our marriage--it was the hardest day of my life. I loved De Anna more than anything and I truly regretted the decisions I had made.

I had always turned to Jesus only when I needed Him. Well, I really needed Him again and I prayed for real change in my life. I knew that complete change was necessary since nothing I had ever done before worked. I would have to be persistent about my relationship with Jesus this time.

Only by the grace of God have I been able to develop the faith and courage to stand up and be a genuine and authentic man. I had to get out of the pool! Develop different habits, different friends and a life that was very unfamiliar at first. But because I chose to move, I have gotten right with God and my wife. For the first time, I am being completely honest. You don't know how freeing that is.

(De Anna) *We chose love. An acquaintance told me about Celebrate Recovery at Chapel Hill, a place where anyone could go and get help with any of their hurts, habits, or hang ups. David and I agreed that we needed Christ to be at the front and center of our lives. C.R. is where God wanted us and soon we had hope for the survival of our marriage. At Celebrate Recovery, with Jesus by our side, we began our journey of recovery together.*

Though it was awkward at first, David and I started reading the Bible and praying together everyday. The first eight to nine months were not easy. It was a period of adjustment and defining boundaries. However, I saw David become a spiritual leader of our family. It was his actions, not his words that proved to me that he genuinely loved God and loved me.

If we had stayed where we were... stayed by the pool... our marriage would be over today. We chose to move, and Jesus saved us.

How many of you have ever swum in a public pool? Remember hearing the lifeguard blow the whistle and say, "Everyone out of the pool!" Well... [blow whistle] **Everyone out of the pool!** Every one of us has some part of their life... private habits, computer issues, alcohol issues, work issues, relationship issues, family issues, marriage issues... that are dysfunctional and paralyzing.

Right now, I'm stuck on the mat in a relationship with dear friends. I know I have to say something. But it is very risky. It is easier for me to ignore this issue...to stay in the pool...than for me to do something about it. I prefer the dysfunctional safety in this area of my life than the uncertain health that might be out there. **But this passage...this story...has persuaded me that, in this area of my life, I've got to get out of the pool.** I've got to move. I've already taken the first steps. I contacted a counselor friend for advice on this subject. I am determined to keep moving...even though I know it will be risky and disruptive.

Now really, is there anyone here who doesn't have some pool that they need to climb out of? Your marriage is paralyzed. Lifeless. Has been for a long time. But it feels safer to do nothing. What would Jesus say? **Get up. Pick up your mat and walk!** Your friend at school is on a path to self-destruction. It is safer to ignore him...just like everyone else does. What would Jesus say? **Get up. Pick up your mat and walk!**

Your boss treats you like dirt, but in this economy you are too afraid to rock the boat. What would Jesus say? **Get up. Pick up your mat and walk!** You are 50 pounds overweight and your test results are terrifying. It is easier to ignore your doctor's warnings. What would Jesus say? **Get up. Pick up your mat and walk!**

"Walking" does not necessarily mean walking **away** from the problem. As we will learn next week, sometimes it means walking right toward the problem. What it means is not staying paralyzed. Not remaining content with familiar dysfunction. Having the courage to stir things up so that they might get better. And most of all, for us, it means trusting Jesus! This isn't about our determination or self-discipline. This is about us obeying the Master, daring to believe that when he tells us to **Get up. Pick up your mat and walk....** that He will give us the strength to do what we cannot possibly do on our own.

Baptism is a symbol of that. Of Jesus doing what we could not do. Of his Holy Spirit washing us clean, making us new and giving us a fresh start and a new life. These waters aren't magical...but they are redemptive and powerful. And this morning...at the dawn of our New Year, I invite us back into the pool to remind us where our redemption and our healing and our power to change comes from. If you are a baptized follower of Christ, I invite you to come forward... if you wish and when you are ready... and renew your baptismal vows. We will say, "Remember your baptism...and move." Your response? "I **will** move."

SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **Read** the passage out loud.
- **Reflect & Apply Individually:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **Reflect & Apply Together:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **Pray together:** tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **Dig deeper**
 1. What is the significance of Jesus' question to the man? What do you think of his answer? Can you think of a time when you did NOT want to get well...not really. Why?
 2. Do you find anything troubling about the religious leaders response to the man? In what ways do those around us not want us to get well? Why? Ever happened to you?
 3. What is your mat?