

# Healing Lameness: Walking in a New Way

## Miracles, Health, and Healing Series

A Sermon by the Rev. Peter Buss, Jr.

Glenview New Church—April 25, 2010

*“Jesus said to him, ‘Rise, take up your bed and walk.’ And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.” (John 5:8-9)*

**The first step of the day.** There’s something so familiar to us, that most of us do every single day. At a certain time in the morning, we wake up, get out of our bed, and take that first step of the day. True, some of us aren’t morning people. Others of us may take some time to work the kinks out of our bodies before walking feels comfortable. And a few of us aren’t able to do this simple thing. But most of us can.

Well what if you couldn’t? Likely there have been times for each of us, where that wasn’t an option. A broken leg, a stay in the hospital, a bout of sickness... These things can keep us laid up and unable to get along with our day, with all its many useful activities.

Today we focus on a healing miracle that the Lord performed for a man who had been unable to get up and walk for 38 years. Day after day, the simple process that almost all of us go through couldn’t happen—until Jesus came into his life and said to him: “Rise, take up your bed and walk” (John 5:8). Without getting overly dramatic, if we put ourselves in the place of this man, what a wonder it must have been to feel the strength to actually do what was commanded—to stand, roll up his bedding, and put one foot in front of the other.

**Correspondential imagery.** With a story like this, it’s not difficult to perceive a deeper message. The episode is bursting with symbolism, or what the Writings for the New Church call correspondences. All we need to do is focus on walking: we know that it stands for doing something, being active, getting up and going. To quote from the Writings for the New Church:

The activity of ‘walking’ means living.... This is attributable solely to the influx of the spiritual world into ideas composing thought, and then into words; for without that influx would anyone ever talk of walking instead of living—of walking in the law, in the statutes, in the commandments, or in the fear of God? (*Arcana Caelestia* 8420)

We also can easily see the opposite. Lying in a bed—lameness in this case—is the inability to walk, or live according to the Lord’s commandments: a powerlessness to act. Again, we can see why. What are the things that keep someone in bed? Fatigue is one thing; laziness is another; depression is a third, very sad reason people might not feel the energy to get up and going; being sick is another; and finally, being injured or disabled (lame). Considering these situations further, we see that many of them involve a state of mind more than a state of the body. That’s why “lameness” in the Word stands for the false ideas and the negative motivations that can exist in the human spirit, or the absence of understanding that keeps a person mentally

paralyzed—unable to act. If there's a lack of knowledge, for example, a person can genuinely feel incapable of moving forward, saying, "I simply don't know what to do." If there's self doubt, or lack of confidence, or fear—"I just can't"—it can hold us back. If there's an unwillingness—an "I won't" or "I simply don't want to"—it too can make us spiritually stuck. And if there's an internal listening to excuses that simply aren't true—"I have no one to help me," "It's not fair," "I can't change," "I deserve to act this way..."—then obviously we're holding ourselves back. In all these cases, people are figuratively lying in their bed, instead of walking—sometimes for extended periods of time, like this man at the pool of Bethesda.

To those states of life, or perspectives within ourselves, we could address a few key quotes from the Lord's Word:

- "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength.... They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." (Isaiah 40:31)
- "The voice of the Lord is powerful; He makes them skip like a calf..." (Psalm 29:4,6)
- "Let the children of Zion be joyful in their King. Let them praise His name with the dance..." (Psalm 149:2-3)
- "[Joshua] said to the people, 'Proceed, and march around the city, and let him who is armed advance before the ark of the Lord!'" (Joshua 6:7)
- "The steps of a good man are ordered by the LORD, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down; for the LORD upholds him with His hand." (Psalm 37:23-24)

Walking, running, skipping, dancing, marching—these are the spiritual activities which the Lord is encouraging us to engage in. They stand for the good and useful things that we can do, the ways in which we can take charge of our destiny, the energy to engage, and take on life's challenges, be they small or large, with the Lord at our side. "Rise, take up your bed and walk." And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked" (John 5:8-9).

**Three steps.** So what is it that can help us do just that? What can help us avoid the traps of apathy, non-clinical depression, fear, doubt, false ways of thinking, giving into our negative motives, and instead figuratively get up and get going—with energy and confidence? There are three basic steps: get your heart in the right place; get your head in the right place; do the things that your heart and your head indicate are wisest. The reason that this is the formula for curing spiritual lameness, or the inability to walk in the paths that the Lord leads us on, is that it describes the very people we are. We read, "We have been created as images and likenesses of God—as vessels for [Divine love and Divine wisdom].... God is love itself and wisdom itself. That love and that wisdom has a drive to be useful" (*True Christian Religion* 65, 67). We read further, "Love, wisdom, and useful endeavor are a trio that cannot be separated. If separated, none of them is real" (*Apocalypse Revealed* 875). Indeed these are the core things that make us to be human: our ability to love, ability to think and plan, and from these two, our ability to act. "For a person to be human" (truly human or whole), "no component can be missing" (*Divine Love and Wisdom* 389).

**1. The heart.** Talking these three steps then, the first is to get our hearts in the right place. It is vital, in this regard, to note what the Lord first said to this man at

the pool of Bethesda: “Do you want to be made well?” (John 5:6). The reason for this question, which has a seemingly obvious answer, is that it get to the “heart” of the matter. Attitudes matter. Motivation matters. Getting our hearts in the right place matters.

In this regard, we can turn to the Lord in His Word to hear from Him the attitudes of heart *with* which He can work, and with which He *cannot*—at least not without difficulty. First we focus on those attitudes of heart that He cannot work with. There is the most pervasive and “deadliest” enemy to the providence of the Lord in our lives: “the love of self” (*Divine Providence* 210). The second is a “negative outlook”—“I can’t,” “It’ll never work,” “There’s no way” (see *Arcana Caelestia* 2338). A third is “a proud heart” or a “heart of stone” (*Arcana Caelestia* 9337). Next comes an “unwillingness to be led” by the Lord, based on an unwillingness to acknowledge our need for the Lord’s help (*Divine Providence* 231). Another way of saying the same thing is an over-reliance on self—“I can do it by myself” or “It’s all on me.”

On the positive side of the equation, there are the opposites: an “affirmative outlook,” which brings with it the gift of hope (*Arcana Caelestia* 2338); humility, which is said to be “heart of flesh” into which the Lord can flow (*Arcana Caelestia* 9337); the willingness to be led by the Lord and to turn to Him for help (*Heaven and Hell* 281); the desire to do what is good and useful (*Arcana Caelestia* 6073; *Heaven and Hell* 393); and finally, the willingness to change for the better—even to compel oneself to do as the Lord commands (*Arcana Caelestia* 1937).

With all these teachings in mind, we come back to the question the Lord asked the man at the pool of Bethesda: “Do you want to be made well?” It’s the same question the Lord could ask each of us, whenever spiritual lameness afflicts our lives. If we are stuck in a negative pattern of acting or not acting... If a relationship we care about is unhealthy... If our spiritual life in general is going nowhere... If there’s an emptiness in our lives that is causing sadness... Do we want it to change? It’s not so much a question of “Do we want it to go away?” because of course we do. Rather it’s a question of our willingness to do the hard work we may very well need to do to receive healing in this part of our lives from the Lord. We know that people don’t change unless they want to—especially if change involves effort. So the Lord’s first step was to challenge the heart.

**2. The mind.** The next logical step is to get our head in the right place. We know from the story that the man launched into his excuse: “Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up” (John 5:7). We can see this as a logical outcropping of the heart not being entirely in the right place. “I’m doing my best” “I deserve to be in the water first...” “The situation isn’t fair.” “I’m the victim.” Again, it’s harder for the Lord to work with this type of attitude and the thought processes that it spurns.

But there is another facet to this story—a visual image that is tremendously helpful in terms of step two in the process of being healed. It is the bed on which the man was lying.

The bed, in a literal sense, is a key symbol of inactivity. The person is just lying there, and nothing is happening. But it is also the key to a change of mind that needs to happen. Symbolically, the bed stands for a person’s “doctrinal framework”

or idea matrix that forms their belief system. As we heard earlier, “A bed symbolizes a doctrinal framework because of its correspondence; for as the body rests in its bed, so the mind rests in its doctrine” (*Apocalypse Revealed* 137).

In this regard, we could turn to one of the most famous founding documents of the United States, the Declaration of Independence. The second paragraph begins with the words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident...”—and then follows a list of concepts: “...that all men are created equal,” that we all have “certain unalienable rights,” that governments exist “to secure these rights,” etc. It’s not the particular list that’s important for our purpose: it’s the things that we, as individuals, hold as “self-evident.” These are the things we believe. These are our “go to” concepts, that our minds “rest in” or return to over and over again.

The actionable concept here is to examine those very concepts. What are the backdrop beliefs that we hold to, when it comes to the “stuck” or “spiritually lame” parts of our lives? Here’s one doctrinal framework that isn’t very helpful:

- “The Lord, if He cared, would give me some guidance here, or make this go away.”
- “Other people are primarily responsible for the problems that exist; if only they saw things the way I see them, they’d change and all would be well.”
- “The weak acknowledge their mistakes first; the strong never give in.”
- “I just can’t do the things that other people seem to be able to do.”
- All of us can see, that if these are the truths a person holds as self-evident—the doctrinal framework within which the mind takes its rest—healing or change cannot take place.

So different is it if a person believes the Lord to be a God who can help—who is all-powerful and all-loving—but who requires our participation. What if the doctrinal framework that we embrace includes the fact that:

- “we live, think, intend, speak, and act” as if of ourselves” (*Divine Providence* 210);
- that our prudence, effort and energy is required;
- that we use our freedom and rationality to position ourselves to be led by the Lord (*Ibid.*);
- that we are created as incredibly capable and resourceful people, able to solve issues in our lives with the Lord’s help, especially when that help is prayed for;
- that the Lord enlightens the mind that is focused on a useful change, especially if the heart is concerned primarily with the welfare of others;
- that the Lord calls us to be useful, and to repent, and to compel ourselves (*True Christian Religion* 406; *Arcana Caelestia* 1937)...

As the saying goes, “The Lord helps those who help themselves.” Wouldn’t we expect, with this “bed” to lie on, that we would more often receive from the Lord new insights that apply specifically to the situation of spiritual lameness that needs healing?

**3. Walking in a new way.** If the heart is in the right place, and the mind is in the right place, then we are ready for the next directive from the Lord. The actual

healing in this miracle happened at the moment when the man responded to the Lord's call to "rise, take up [his] bed, and walk." The act of walking here is "a new way of life" (*Heavenly Doctrine* 178).

In this regard we could consider an example: a relationship that has become strained—that is truly stuck because neither person is willing to bend, and both of them believe that the other has to make the first move—the heart and the head in the wrong place. What if one person answers the first question affirmatively: Do you want to be made well? Do you want this relationship in your life? Do you want it to improve? The answer not only is "yes," but there's a willingness to get the heart in the right place: to humble one's pride, to let go of selfish hurts, to allow the heart to be warmed to that other person once again.... Then there's the implied question: What kind of bed are you lying on? What excuse matrix is keeping you from doing your part? Imagine the person thinking along the lines of: It's my responsibility to change; I'm not being fair; while the other person has to meet me half way, I have to do my part; I'm going to show that I want this relationship to get better by speaking words of apology, trusting that if I approach with humility and humanness, there'll be a reciprocation, and the relationship can begin to move in a better direction.

Obviously the next step is to do what the heart and the mind dictate. And the healing can begin to take place.

"Jesus said to him, 'Rise, take up your bed, and walk.' And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked" (John 5:8-9). In that instance, three steps of healing came together: the heart, the mind, and walking in a new way. They are exactly the same three steps that are contained in this familiar directive from the Lord, with which we close today: "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8). **Amen.**

**Readings from the Lord's Word:** John 5:2-9; *Apocalypse Revealed* 137; *Arcana Caelestia* 8420.

## John 5

<sup>2</sup>Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, which is called in Hebrew, <sup>4</sup>Bethesda, having five porches. <sup>3</sup>In these lay a great multitude of sick people, blind, lame, paralyzed, <sup>5</sup>waiting for the moving of the water. <sup>4</sup>For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had. <sup>5</sup>Now a certain man was there who had an infirmity thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus saw him lying there, and knew that he already had been in that condition a long time, He said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

<sup>7</sup>The sick man answered Him, "Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me."

<sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your bed and walk." <sup>9</sup>And immediately the man was made well, took up his bed, and walked.

And that day was the Sabbath. <sup>10</sup>The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."

<sup>11</sup>He answered them, "He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'"

<sup>12</sup>Then they asked him, "Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?" <sup>13</sup>But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in that place. <sup>14</sup>Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."

<sup>15</sup>The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.

## *Apocalypse Revealed 137*

A bed symbolizes a doctrinal framework because of its correspondence; for as the body rests in its bed, so the mind rests in its doctrine. The doctrine symbolized by a bed, however, is the kind that each person acquires for himself, either from the Word or from his own intelligence. For it is in this that his mind finds repose and, so to speak, sleeps. The beds that people rest in in the spiritual world come from just such an origin. For everyone there has a bed in keeping with the character of his knowledge and intelligence—the wise having magnificent beds, those without wisdom having humble beds, and falsifiers having squalid beds.

## *Arcana Caelestia 8420*

'Whether they walk in My law or not' means, whether they can lead a life of truth and good. This is clear from the meaning of 'walking' as living, and from the meaning of 'law' as the Word. And since the Word is meant, so is Divine Truth, and thus also teachings about what is good and true, so that 'walking in the law of Jehovah' means leading a life of truth and good as teachings about them demand. Everyone knows that 'walking in the law' means living as the law demands, for the

expression is part of everyday language. From this it may be seen that the activity of 'walking' means living, and also that the actual word 'walking', like so many other words, carries the very meaning it possesses in the spiritual sense. This is attributable solely to the influx of the spiritual world into ideas composing thought, and then into words; for without that influx would anyone ever talk of walking instead of living—of walking in the law, in the statutes, in the commandments, or in the fear of God? The same applies to 'going', that it means living, and also to travelling, advancing, and sojourning.