

### THE HEART'S DEEPEST DESIRE

What do you want? What is your heart's desire? Do you know? Do you know what your heart is truly aching for?

A shriveled man lay in the sun like a pile of rags dumped there by accident. He hardly appeared to be human. But those who passed by every day recognized him. It was his spot and he had been there for as long as anyone could remember. He was disabled, dropped there every morning by his family, and picked up again at the end of the day. Over the years, a gallery of human brokenness gathered by the pool of Bethesda - the lame, the blind, the deaf. It was believed that an angel would come and stir the waters, and the first one in the water would be healed. So, the desperate huddled near the water, hoping for a miracle.

'Do you want to get well?' At first the man thought the question was meant for someone else. 'What did you say?' he asked. 'Do you want to get well?'

The man sat there, speechless, blinking into the sun. Slowly, the words seeped into his consciousness. Do I want to get well? What kind of question is that? Why else would I be lying here every day for the past 38 years?

The answer seems so obvious. Why wouldn't a person who is lame want to get up, move about, take a walk? Of course, the fellow wanted to get well! Who would ask such a question? It was Jesus who asked the question. Why did he ask such an obvious question? Or was it? As with most of his questions, Jesus was probing for something we do not see. He knew the answer, but did this man?

Do we? Do *you* know what your heart really wants?

Think of the fellow on the ground for a moment. His entire life had been shaped by his brokenness. When the other children ran and play, he sat and watched. When his family stood at the temple to pray, he lay on the ground. Every time he needed a drink or had to go to the bathroom, someone had to pick him up and take him there.

For 38 years he had gone to the pool, hoping for a miracle. At what point did callouses close off his heart to what he really wanted? First a year went by, then two years, then ten, then twenty. How long can a person sustain hope when continually disappointed? Some hold out longer than others, but eventually we all reach a point of resignation or cynicism or bitterness. As the years rolled on, this man, like all of us, closed his heart. So Jesus had to open his heart and reawaken his desire. What do you want? What is your heart's desire?

On another occasion Jesus met a Samaritan woman drawing water at a well. She had come alone in the heat of the day, and they both knew why. By coming when the sun was high, she was less likely to run into anyone. You see, her sexual lifestyle had earned her a "reputation." Having one partner after another wasn't looked upon kindly. She was on her sixth lover, and so she would rather face the scorching heat of the sun than the searing words of the women who came at evening to draw water. She succeeded in avoiding the women, but she ran into God instead.

Did Jesus talk to her about her immorality? No, he spoke to her about her thirst, her heart's deepest desire. 'If you knew the generosity of God and who I am, you would be asking me for a drink, and I would give

you fresh, living water.” He didn’t lecture her about purity. He didn’t even mention it, except to say that he knew what her life had been like: “You’ve had five husbands, and the man you’re living with now is not your husband.” In other words, now that we both know it, let’s talk about your heart’s real thirst, since the life you’ve chosen isn’t working. “The water I give” he said, “will be a spring of water, gushing fountains of endless life.”

So again, the question, what do you want? What is your heart’s desire?

Isn’t your heart aching for God? When you look deep into your heart, isn’t it true that what you really want is God? Isn’t it true that you long to be close to God? Closer than you’ve ever been? Isn’t it true that you yearn for assurance that despite everything, God loves you and forgives you and values you and desires you?

In today’s Gospel reading Jesus is on the way to the cross. He stops to look at Jerusalem and he weeps for the people, for their hearts were closed. They were blind to what they were searching for; they were oblivious to their hearts’ true desire. Jesus stood there and wept; it tore him up, for he wanted nothing more than to give them life, life with God, but they were not open to it. Their hearts had become hearts of stone.

Christianity has nothing to say those who are completely happy with the way things are. Its message is for those who hunger and thirst - for those who desire life as it was meant to be. Jesus healed the man at the pool of Bethesda and he gave the woman at the well the love she had spent her life searching for. Jesus is passionate about this! He went to the cross to give you your heart’s deepest desire. He suffered and died in order to give you life with God.

Isn’t that what you really want? Isn’t that what we all really want? And if so, shouldn’t we pursue it?