

From Henry's Desk....

Paralysis and Christmas

Various forms of paralysis have plagued humans since the origins of recorded history. Earlier this year the Christopher and Dana Reeve Foundation published a study involving statistics of the different causes of paralysis in the United States. Paralysis is usually caused by vascular disease, trauma, birth defects, diseases of the central nervous system (brain and spinal cord), which include infectious diseases such as polio. The published study revealed that 5.6 million Americans have some form of paralysis and about one quarter are spinal cord injuries. The Foundation funded the study but did not run or design it. The goal was to get accurate data, improve fund raising and increase services. The lead investigator was Anthony Cahill who is the director of the University of New Mexico School of Medicine's division of disability and health policy. The findings are based on a phone survey on 33,000 households. 7% of those with paralysis from an accident or an injury occurred in the military. Two thirds had average household incomes of less than \$30,000.

Causes of paralysis

Stroke	1,608,000
Spinal cord injury	1,275,000
Multiple Sclerosis	939,000
Cerebral Palsy	412,000
Post Polio Syndrome	272,000
Traumatic Brain Injury	242,000
Neurofibromatosis	212,000
Unspecific birth defect	110,000

Once again we find ourselves in the holiday season. Those of us who celebrate the Christmas season in our churches find this time of year to be a time of family gatherings, exchanging gifts, inspirational seasonal music and the reading of Christmas Bible stories. The Bible has lots of stories involving various physical disabilities including skin diseases, seizures, blindness, deafness and paralysis. In the gospels there are five events involving people that are probably paralyzed for one reason or another. Jesus is involved in helping these people in these five events or healings. They can be found in:

Mark 2:1-12

Mark 3:1-6

Luke 13:10-17
Matthew 8:5-13
John 5:1-9

This story in the gospel of John has some interesting clues. The story is recorded below:

After this, Jesus went to Jerusalem for a religious festival. Near the Sheep Gate in Jerusalem there is a pool with five porches; in Hebrew it is called Bethzatha. A large crowd of sick people were lying on the porches—the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. A man was there who had been sick for thirty-eight years Jesus saw him lying there, and he knew that the man had been sick for such a long time; so he asked him, "Do you want to get well?" The sick man answered, "Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up; while I am trying to get in, somebody else gets there first." Jesus said to him, "Get up, pick up your mat, and walk." Immediately the man got well; he picked up his mat and started walking. The day this happened was a Sabbath.

First, the types of sick people which are emphasized are the blind, the lame and the paralyzed. The man who had been sick for thirty-eight years could easily be one of the paralyzed. He obviously is not able to move with any speed, has a mat and he does not have any help. One possibility for the cause of his paralysis could be polio. Also, after thirty-eight years this man could have Post Polio Syndrome. This is speculative because we know very little about this man. One could speculate that this man's disorder originated from childhood. If the original disorder was polio, perhaps this man managed to survive or compensate as so many of us have done for thirty or forty years until PPS began to unmercifully slow us down. Now, after thirty-eight years this man needs to lie down a lot or can no longer walk or get around on his own. He is slow in motion and cannot get into the pool because he cannot move fast enough.

Does the above description seem similar to some of us? We have gotten slower, weaker, need to lie down a lot and everyone else of our generation is moving with comparative ease. I don't believe any of us expect a man with healing power to walk up to us and tell us to get up, pick up our mat (or brace, scooter, wheelchair) and walk. However, we do have folks who will help us get into the pool and feel better. At this time of the year we probably should be grateful that medical science and other healthcare professionals can help us and provide a better quality of life for all of us. Our support group is also a major help in its efforts to provide shared experiences, sound advice, educational opportunities, advocacy, mutual support and fun. One of our most enjoyable social events is our holiday party which is scheduled for December 5. We meet on the Sabbath for some and the day before the Sabbath for others.