

A Meditation: Rise! Take Your Mat and Walk

By Laurence Gangloff

The following Bible reflection was presented at the 2019 11th European Conference, held in the Netherlands. A total of 76 women representing 28 different countries were in attendance. It is based on the Bible text selected for the 2020 World Day of Prayer service written by the women of WDP Zimbabwe.

Bible Text

John 5:2-9 New International Version (NIV)

² Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda^[a] and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades. ³ Here a great number of disabled people used to lay — the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. ^[4]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. Amen

Meditation

Hello Sisters,

Let me welcome you warmly to this 11th European conference under the theme “A Story to tell, a call to act”. Allow me to start by telling my personal story...

I was a blanket. Hard to believe, but I was the blanket who covered this man for thirty-eight years. Can you imagine how close we were?

- I knew every part of his body
- I knew when he was happy and when he wasn't
- He needed me day and night! On sunny days to protect him from the flies and during the night to protect him from the cold.
- He needed me too, day and night, every week, every day of the year.

Every day my friend and I were together in the same place. One day, a man came by. Later, I discovered that his name was Jesus. And this man asked my friend, “Do you want to be made well?” and also something really incredible “Get up, pick up your mat and walk!” It was incredible: my friend could not stand... Yet you know: it happened as it was said! He stood up, picked up his mat and walked.

He took his mat, but not his blanket! He walked away and just left me on the floor! After all those years, he forgot me. Can you imagine how I felt? I passed through so many emotions. Loss, grief, anger, sorrow, depression, hope... oh yes! I was hoping that my friend - would remember me, come back and pick me up... and let me share his new life.

But nothing happened. I was so angry, so hurt and upset that I decided I will never again call my friend by his name. I kept my promise, even though I'm not angry at him anymore.

Are you interested to hear the end of my personal story?

Later, a woman passed by the sheep gate, certainly she was not alone of course - when passing by this huge city gate. But she was the one who saw me and picked me up from the street. She was courageous, because being a

close friend for 38 years ... well I must admit that I was dirty ... and even stinking. She washed me, and washed me, and ...washed me.

I became clean. Then she cut me in smaller pieces and I became useful again for her house. And I loved how I became part of this very active life. I saw the birth of the babies, I saw them growing - I was used for all the needs of the house. Being a piece of fabric is not a quiet job. Always in use to wash, clean, dry, remove dust or dirt... I don't complain. I had a nice time in this house.

This woman was like most of you: **a volunteer to bring change where it may be needed.**

Do you remember all of the improvements or changes you have made recently? Take one minute to think about what you have all accomplished these last days, you will be astonished... just remember ... (*a clean house, a fridge filled for the family, to do lists, emails, phone calls*). Yes, you may have done all those or more - actions taken to be able to come here, and to sit, and to hear my story.

My story is not finished yet! This woman, when she became a bit less active, she started to spend time with friends, to drink tea, eat cookies. She started also to think about her life, to read more the scriptures and to spend time in prayer and meditation.

She reminded me of things that happened closer to me, especially the day my old friend met Jesus. Jesus who changed his life with one question - "Do you want to be made well?"

She was asking herself "How would Jesus challenge me today?" and "What can I improve in my life?"

Honestly, I could not answer all her questions. I can only certify that she was able to transform my life. As Jesus transformed the life of my friend.

She used me one more time, to prepare this patchwork as a surprise for this conference and for the women who prepared this week!

And here is my final question don't you feel, sisters, that we are all called to be transformed but also to be agents of transformation for others?

I pray that God of love will inspire us all this week, that the God of Action will empower us. AMEN