Do you want to be made well?

At first this question seems pretty superfluous, doesn't it? The little sarcastic voice inside of me imagines the sick man replying to Jesus, "nah, why would I want to be made well?! I've just been sitting here for 38 years for kicks!"

But on second glance, this question of "do you want to be made well?" and the conversation it precipitates is far more than an unnecessary add-on to one of the Gospel's healing miracles.

The home in which I grew up, while rich in love and opportunity, always seemed to have a shadow lurking over it. My grandfather, who lived right next door, had been born in the polish city of Brody. He was identified early as a prodigy on the piano and sent to Vienna as a pre-teen, a move that would later save his life.

In the late 1930's, as part of their efforts to empty Vienna of publicly notable Jewish talent, Nazi SS officers arrested him on the streets, took him to a secluded building on the outskirts of the city, and proceeded to beat and torture him until he lost consciousness. Having barely survived the experience, he and my grandmother knew they couldn't stay in Europe any longer, so my grandmother massaged his broken hands back to health, and they escaped to New York via Hungary. My grandfather's piano talents helped him establish a new life in the United States, and the family eventually settled in California.

My grandfather almost never spoke of the family he left behind in Poland, but he did know what had become of them. In the 1950's, a Soviet attorney had sent him a terse letter explaining that during the conquest of Brody, they, along with all of the city's Jews, had been summarily killed in the streets.

This became the family secret which everyone knew but of which no one ever spoke. A therapist even advised the extended family to steer clear of the topic, believing it was better to leave that stone unturned than to risk unleashing what lay beneath it.

My grandfather did not want to be made well, at least not on anyone's terms but his own. I certainly believe that he has ultimately been made well-the Resurrection is proof positive that God's final word to creation is "yes" no matter how loudly we try to bellow "no." But in this lifetime, there are ways in which all of say no to Jesus' simple question, "do you want to be made well?"

I will never stop wondering what might have happened if someone, anyone, had dared to ask my grandfather that directly. Sure, there was plenty of talk *about* him and *about* his trauma, but to my knowledge no one ever simply looking him in the eye and asked if, and how, he wanted to be made well. Perhaps it would have made no visible difference at all, but at the level of the heart it would have changed everything.

This question, and ones like it, change everything. They pierce through all of the false shields we set up around ourselves and lay us bare to see, and be seen, through the eyes of Christ.

These are the questions that turn us from objects into human beings, the questions that, in the words of Austrian Jewish philosopher-theologian Martin Buber transform our engagement with one another from "I and it" into "I and Thou." They are the questions that say, "I see you. I see you in all of your human uncertainty, and in all of your divine perfection."

How often do we neglect to ask these questions? How often do we assume what others want and need without taking even a moment to hear it from their own mouths?

As a church and a society, we do amazing amounts of work to help those in distress. We see a homeless person, and we get to work immediately trying to provide food and shelter. We see someone sick or injured in the hospital, and we respond promptly with a prayer and a fluffed pillow.

And all of this is wonderful. But all of it is also greatly lacking if we do not take the time to back up, ask "do you want to be made well?", and listen deeply for the answer.

Because sometimes we want to resist being made well. Sometimes we believe we cannot be made well. Sometimes our definition of well doesn't jibe with what others think it should be. Sometimes all we really want is to be seen and to be acknowledged as a child of God. We want to be a Thou, and not an It, and this alone makes us well.

Jesus' question "do you want to be made well?" to the man lying by the Sheep Gate can be a pattern for us all. It is the question that brings grace to any interaction and creates room for God. And that is what this cathedral is all about.

As you heard in the announcement at the beginning of today's service, my time here at Grace Cathedral is soon coming to an end. If I had to summarize what I have learned and received from this wonderful community in the past four years, I would say it is to both ask and answer, "do you want to be made well?"

I have been blessed with so many opportunities to do ministry during my time here, primarily with the oversight of our outreach and interfaith work. And in that work, I have discovered anew what I cannot do. I cannot magically get the homeless off the streets. I cannot free prisoners. I cannot cure mental illness. And I cannot undo the hurts of religious strife.

But along with all these can'ts, I have also discovered what I, and we, can do, and it is infinitely more powerful than what we cannot do. We can take the time to listen to the story that no one else has time for. We can hear and respectfully respond when someone asks to be made well or when she says she would rather be left alone. We can see a person where the rest of the world sees an object. We can be like the Christ who came not so much to fix the world's problems but to saturate its inhabitants with divine dignity.

And as much as Grace Cathedral has prompted me to ask "do you want to be made well?" it has also invited me to answer. In this crucible where we dare to gather together to seek divine things, I have found it impossible to hide from the hound of heaven who, though he respects us as equals, never stops asking us to accept his gifts of love and healing.

So, dear people of Grace, I leave you with gratitude for which there really are no words. Thank you for being a community that patiently and persistently asks all who enter if they want to be made well. Thank you for being a home in which everyone is a Thou, and no one is an It. Thank you for being a place that seeks to fix no one but offers everyone the opportunity to be real, to heal, and to grow. I will miss you and carry you in my heart for a lifetime. God bless you.