

# Sermon: Easter 6

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Year C

Acts 16:9-15

Psalm 67

Revelation 21:10, 22-22:5

John 5:1-9

In today's Gospel reading from John... verses 3b - 4 were omitted... but not because I didn't want you to hear them... they were omitted because the New Revised Standard Version translation... which we use... omits them... the oldest and most reliable scriptural witnesses do not contain them... though they are striking... the wording of these verses in Greek... is unlike the rest of the Gospel of John... affirming their later addition... but they are listed in study notes and commentaries... so let me read vv. 3 - 5 with them included... *In these [porticos] lay many invalids... blind... lame... and paralyzed... waiting for the stirring of the water... for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool... and stirred up the water... and whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was made well from whatever disease that person had... one man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years...* this addition... reflected some popular beliefs... that spirits were responsible for the otherwise inexplicable bubbling of some pools of water...

When Jesus asks the man if he wants to be healed... instead of offering a resounding YES... he shares how long he's been there... a long time... when Jesus asks the man if he wants to be healed... he offers an excuse for why he hasn't been able to get down into the water... it's not his fault... the troubling of the water lasts for only a short while... and others beat him to it... but if he relies on an angel coming down... only at certain seasons... to stir the water... then is he really relying on God...

This lame man is unlike many others whom Jesus healed... the hemorrhaging woman knew all she had to do was touch the hem of Jesus' cloak... the Roman centurion said... *just speak the word and my servant will be healed...* the Syrophenician woman

knew Jesus came for all people... the man in today's story seems to lack faith... but in this instance... faith is a moot point...

ELCA pastor Elisabeth Johnson writes... John's Gospel does not answer the question of why certain people are healed and others are not... but this passage makes it clear that healing is not a matter of having "enough" faith... as if that could be measured... that is not how Jesus operates... clearly Jesus does not heal for the benefits to himself... he does not seek gratitude or praise or devotion... he heals people simply because this is the work of his Father...

The Rev. Martin Smith writes... Jesus is depicted here as both troubler... and healer... Jesus troubles the paralyzed man by confronting his rationalized inertia... [to what degree is he relying on himself or only on forces outside of himself...] he endangers the man by setting him up as a troublemaker in the eyes of the Judean authorities... and he stirs up trouble for himself... as the healing itself inflames the authorities' determination to paint him as a sabbath-breaker who called God his own Father... making himself equal to God...

Though can you imagine how it would be... if Jesus saw this lame man... and said... *Sorry... but it's the Sabbath... my hands are tied... you'll just have to wait...* even in Luke 14:3 Jesus asked the lawyers and Pharisees if it was lawful to heal on the Sabbath... but they were silent... and so he asked... *Which of you... if your son... or an ox fell into a well... wouldn't immediately pull him out on a Sabbath day?*

*The magic in the water lasts for only a short while... and others beat me to it... it's not my fault...* when the Pool of Beth-zatha bubbles only occasionally... only in certain seasons... it's like those big-box stores on Black Friday morning... we believe there's not enough to go around... and there could be a stampede of sorts... but God's resources are limitless...

And it may be the Sabbath... but for Jesus... sundials and calendars don't mean a thing... for Jesus... it is always God's time... *kairos*... and never human time... *chronos*... it is always time to heal and restore... the divine love that God has for us... cannot be restricted by things like Daylight Savings Time... God's love flows... like the river in our reading from Revelation... which feeds the Trees of Life... it's the same water gushing up to Eternal Life... that Jesus offered the Samaritan woman at the well...

Angels are God's messengers... they are channels for God's healing Word... but when we wait on angels alone... we may unwittingly impose certain conditions or restrictions on whether and when we'll get up and walk... and the living room couch becomes our mat... sometimes we feel paralyzed at the idea of initiating a conversation... sometimes the need to speak our truth immobilizes us... and maybe... just maybe... this verse and a half was removed... so that we would not mistakenly rely on bubbling water or angels for healing... and wholeness... and reconciliation... but on God in Christ... who simply asks... in every moment... *Do you want to be made well?*

Perhaps we do need some still waters so that we can rest... so we can gather our strength... our thoughts... and breathe... but when they remain still for too long... we may no longer challenge ourselves... we may become complacent... or too self-satisfied... or too self-reliant... and when the waters of life become troubled... we may be able to see only bubbles... forgetting that we need God... and that we need others...

I have sometimes been that lame man... have sometimes felt paralyzed by life... or stuck in some situation... passed on by others... while I was unable to move... because of what I thought I needed... or how I thought things needed to be... before I could pick up my mat... but it was the love of God embodied in Christ Jesus... that troubled me so... that I had to move past my paralysis... to let go of the boundaries or burdens I felt... and continues to help me... when I need it... to pick up my mat... and make a little more progress along The Way...

The last sentence in today's reading reminds us that it was the Sabbath... when there was to be no work... and no healing... Gail O'Day writes... this passage presents us with John's first example of overt rejection of Jesus... and concern over violation of Sabbath law escalates almost immediately into a resolve to kill him... though we must be careful to separate these particular Jewish leaders from the Jewish faith... these men make Jesus their enemy... because he threatens not only their very perception of reality... but also their power and authority... some of which they had negotiated with the Roman authorities...

And the defense of Sabbath law... is the defense of an entire system of how to order life and religious practice... it is the defense of a particular understanding of God... and of exactly how God belongs in human experience... and of membership in a religious community... the Jews have too much to lose... and therefore much to defend... if Jesus is allowed to redefine God's presence in the world... [a phenomenon which continues even to this day...] and as religious authorities with the power... they choose to close ranks rather than acknowledge the possibility of a new way... so they choose to eliminate him as a threat...

God is like a lover... who desires our attention... will always accept the hand we extend... but will never force it... will always invite us to Come and See... will always invite us to healing moments which exist out of time... and to be made whole... whether the waters are troubled or calm... angels may bring God's message... but it's Christ Jesus who heals...

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