

Discipleship in the Lectionary – 05/22/2022



A look at the week's lectionary through the lens of discipleship and disciple-making.

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Revised Common Lectionary Year C

Sunday, May 22nd

John 5:1-9

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There's no pleasing some people

In what is reminiscent of the "Alms for an Ex-Leper" scene from Monty Python's *Life of Brian*, in this lectionary text we have one of the most ungrateful people Jesus is recorded as having healed. Yet the more we study this character in the following scenes, the more we might see shadows of this character in our own behavior. The healing of this invalid gives us tremendous hope as well as recognizing the hope we bring to others.

John 5:1-9

¹ After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.*

* Some manuscripts insert, wholly or in part: *waiting for the moving of the water; ⁴for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had.*

The passage follows the healing of the official's son in Cana in Galilee. "After this" marks an undeterminable period of time and it is not possible to be certain what specific feast is being celebrated. The name of the pool translates as "house of mercy." There are a multitude of invalids lying by the pool waiting for the possibility of being cured. Some versions add an extra verse that explains the nature of the cure and helps us to understand the later comments of the man being healed. Whoever was first in the pool after the angel of Lord had stirred the water would be cured of what ailed them.

⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?" ⁷ The sick man answered him, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me."

The text reveals the sick man had spent nearly four decades as an invalid. Jesus knew this (divine knowledge) and asks the man if he wants to be healed. The sick man appears to think Jesus is merely a rabbi (evidenced by addressing Jesus as "Sir") rather than realizing who it is who is talking to him. Rather than responding to the question, "Do you want to be healed?" with an absolute affirmative, the sick man merely complains about why

the traditional way has not worked for him. Contrast this to the attitude and faith of blind Bartimaeus (Mark 10:46-52).

⁸ Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk."⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

Regardless of the man's attitude, Jesus heals him with a command: He tells the formerly sick man to take his bed and walk. The last statement about this being the Sabbath has implications for both Jesus (healing a non-life-threatening injury) and the man (carrying his bedroll). Neither of these acts were prohibited by the original command concerning the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11) but violated later Jewish traditions which evolved into a highly detailed and burdensome set of rules governing every aspect of the Sabbath. Human legislation has the tendency to do this!

While the lectionary text ends here, there is more to this story (5:10-17). The man who had been healed was confronted by Jewish religious leaders and asked why he was breaking Sabbath law by carrying his bedroll. The man recounted the healing but did not know the identity of who it was. Later, Jesus runs into the healed man a short distance away in the temple complex. Jesus said to him, "*See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you*" (5:14). The sin referred to here is unbelief. Such unbelief is the ultimate sin in John's Gospel, often referred to as the Gospel of Belief. The healed man ignores Jesus' warning and goes to the authorities to tell them it was Jesus who healed him. The healed man's response is thus to persecute Jesus in attempt to save himself.

Reflections

The man Jesus healed was most ungrateful! He was an invalid for 38 years and when he encountered Jesus all he did was complain. Jesus heals him and the man walks off without even asking Jesus His name. When the healed man is confronted by the authorities for carrying his bedroll on the Sabbath, he blames Jesus for telling him to do so. When he sees Jesus again and learns of his name, unlike the healings of the man born blind who believes and worships Jesus (9:38) or blind Bartimaeus who follows Jesus (Mark 10:52), this ungrateful man went away and shopped Jesus to the Jewish authorities! There's no pleasing some people!

Some commentators focus on how this man demonstrated neither faith nor gratitude, yet Jesus still selected him from the multitude of invalids present. We must therefore not associate Jesus' healing with the quality of the faith of the recipient in our world. This story also has application for our walk as disciples. Many of us have spent decades as spiritual invalids, living life as though we were lying by the pool near the Sheep Gate. Then, through nothing to do with our own merits we have been called to spiritual health in Christ. Despite being made spiritually well, we are sometimes quick to fall back into the spiritual sickness of legalism in our religion, placing obstacles for other spiritual invalids to access the Living Water. Like the healed man, we can sometimes be quick to put our standing in the world ahead of the purpose we are called to.

We would all still be basking in misery at the Sheep Gate as spiritual invalids if it were not for an encounter with Jesus, the One who came and was raised from death to life so that we may have abundant life in Him. As this story reveals, no situation is too hopeless for Jesus. How many people in our world are in complete spiritual hopelessness living their life desperately chasing one of the many snake oil cures our world offers? Many would argue the current season is a time of much hopelessness in the world. Some might be dismayed by declining church membership. However, it has been from such times in our past that great spiritual awakenings have begun. The greater the hopelessness, the greater the opportunity for the Church.

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