

The Paralytic at the Pool of Siloam - John 5:1-9

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of my heart be pleasing to you
O Lord.

It's no secret that about two and a half years ago we began dealing with a pandemic of epic proportions. **Covid-19 has created an entirely different culture in our world.** Our world's been flipped upside down and we now live differently with a new everchanging normal.

Church is now accessible both physically and virtually. So are many other things. This week I attended from the comfort of my own home (or the cottage to be honest) from about noon to eight everyday a continuing education event called **the Festival of Homiletics which was taking place in Denver, Colorado.** The five day event hosted by Luther Seminary hosted many well known theologians to talk about the theme, **"After the Storm: Preaching and Trauma"**.

When I first heard the theme, I really wondered what would be presented. My oh my, was I in for a surprise.

Trauma affects everyone. That's no secret. We have trouble identifying what affects ourselves let alone what affects others. Beneath the exterior of our skin lie thoughts and experiences that are hidden. **We struggle with the storms of our lives.** Have you ever felt like people look at you funny if you don't come into the **sanctuary** without a **smile** on your face? Yeah it happens. We don't talk about trauma in our lives

with just anyone. I believe most people do not sit well with other people's trauma and pain.

The story from John this morning about Jesus and the **paralytic** at the pool at Bethzatha(not Bathsaida) is one that ignites a conversation of trauma. Once again Jesus is on his journey and he comes to the Pool. The pool at Bethzatha was a place of **healing**. It was believed that when one entered the **Pool the waters would be swirled by the Holy Spirit and healing would be granted.**

The Pool at Bethzatha was no stranger to the sick and unwell. It was a place where everyone who was disabled went – the lame, the blind and paralyzed. Authorities were happy to send them somewhere all together. **They were accepted regardless of their sickness.** Imagine being a blind person, or someone who is lame or paralyzed or handicapped in that day. Now imagine many of them gathered around the pool not because they want to be there but because they have been placed there and are looking for healing. As we generalize storms within our world we too continue in our own rational way to sometimes put all those struggling the same storms into the same box.

Now, imagine meeting the paralyzed man. He cannot move. **For thirty-eight years he has sat on a mat and watched everyone walk by him as they entered the pool.** Trauma? **That is trauma.** It is like living in Canada with our health care system when surgeries are sometimes pushed back no matter the pain or concern we have. It's disappointing.

Without the **help of someone else** there was no way that the paralytic would get to the pool. Imagine for thirty-eight years everyone has walked by him thinking he to be a sinful man and not worthy of help. That is until Jesus shows up. With a few simple words, **“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk,”** Jesus helps the man to walk. It is tempting to turn this story into a story where a sinful man has been saved. Is there any room for mystery? Do we need to know why the man was a paralytic? Can we not see God was present in the paralytic before Jesus arrived? Jesus simply put God into action for this man.

The story of the paralytic is our story. Like the paralytic we all face trauma in our lives. It plays out in many ways and affects us all differently.

- For some it shows up in the form of anxiety.
- For others it may be a broken relationship with family.
- Perhaps there is a history of traumatic abuse that has never been healed fully.
- Maybe you or a loved one has recently heard the big “C” word and cancer is not something you are ready to deal with.
- Covid has caused what I call “covid depression” because of the isolating world we are living in.
- If you have ever talked to an eighty-year old who has lost their license after sixty years of driving (and their independence as a result) –that is traumatic.

In all of these circumstances and more there's a **mystery**. The mystery is that God is present in the hard times even when we don't see him. I'm positive that many of us don't recognize that – until when? **When Jesus reveals himself in love**. Jesus reveals himself through others and in places we are least expecting.

I sort of felt this week, that I was travelling from the safehaven of Canada to the depths of the United States and the problems they are facing. I heard the passion of people and the current toxic situations in the United States. The US Supreme Court reversed the decision of Roe v. Wade essentially eliminating a women's right to choose what happens to her own body and to have an abortion if they wish. How backwards is that. And now after fifty years some states with mainly male governors are enacting laws preventing abortions. People were in tears while preaching about this subject from the pulpit. It is not always good to speak about politics from the pulpit but when it has to do with justice and the simple right for women to choose what happens with their own body an exception is made. This is communal trauma. I am sad for the women of America.

The tears of an entire nation poured out at another mass shooting. At the event contextually because a young white supremacist eighteen year old man chose to follow a critical race theory promoted by crazy media and politicians. He drove hundreds of miles and in full tactical gear **shot and killed** 10 people while injuring others only just the Saturday before we gathered. We were told it was the 198th mass shooting. in the United States this year. People are outraged. They are angry. We should be too.

Rarely, if ever do we as Canadians have to deal with such harsh communal tragedies or tragedies like this. Don't get me wrong though racism is alive and well in Canada. We just choose to ignore it most of the time.

June is National Indigenous Month in Canada.

The pain suffered by indigenous people caused by the Anglican and Catholic churches is finally being recognized by world leaders. **The Pope** has asked for forgiveness from the First Nations and is coming to Canada to apologize in person. **The Arch. bishop of Canterbury** and the Anglican Church recently visited Canada also visiting First Nation reserves and hearing stories of residential survivors. This summer **Prince Charles and Camilla** will be coming to Canada to do the same. Interestingly they are all **avoiding** the one former residential school in Kamloops where hundreds of graves of children were found buried on site. World leaders are paying attention to the struggles of indigenous people in Canada.

As people who feel that as Christians we need to be "nice" we do not know how to deal with anger. We are afraid to upset people, so we don't. I am as angry for the people mentioned previously just as much as I am about the senseless War in the Ukraine. We need to sit with that kind of anger. **We need to work through the communal trauma of anger.** If we do not it can eat us alive. **Again, that is the mystery of God.** God gave us such an emotion for it to be used wisely.

Jesus experienced the ultimate **trauma of dying on the cross** for us. We didn't ask, he just did it. Spending three days in the tomb, he remained still.

Remaining **still is something** we're not very good at doing. Jesus models this being still. A couple of weeks ago we heard the disciples breaking from their work to eat broiled fish on the sea shore with Jesus. They rested.

It's when we rest that we become like the paralytic (hopefully not having to rest for such a long time) that we experience **post-traumatic growth**. Not post-traumatic stress but post-traumatic growth. It's when we have some time apart "from the world"; when we have taken time to do our own **inner work**, it's then that we're able to move forward for, **Jesus meets us where we are. We are children of God, baptised, beloved and forgiven.** May you like the paralytic hear the words of Jesus. "Get up! Lift up your mat and walk". Like the paralytic who was healed in water, be touched by Christ. **Be relevant. Listen to people's hurt. Listen to your own hurt. Share God's story.** Amen.