

March 22, 2020 (3rd Sunday of Lent)
John 5:1-9 (Good News Translation)
Healing Stories "Hope for the Helpless"
The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

Of the many incidents of Jesus healing people that John had observed as a disciple, he selected only a very few to include in his Gospel. Which says, everyone John included was seen as being of utmost important to his readers, including the paralyzed man we will be reflecting on today.

Picture this, Jesus is returning to Jerusalem for a religious festival. He is heading toward the Temple, and thus passes near the Sheep Gate which is the location sheep to be sacrificed go through, and then he comes across the pool which in Hebrew is called Bethzada (meaning House of Mercy). Under the porticos surrounding the pool are a hundred or more people who are ill, blind, and paralyzed.

It is not like they were at the Y for swim. Rather, they are hoping that they will be the first one to get into the pool when it bubbles, which was due to an underground spring that occasionally flooded the pool, or was stirred by an angel. There they all are watching, waiting, hoping things will change.

Jesus has a discussion with one man in particular. What we know about him is he has been paralyzed for a long time. 38 years on your mat is a long time.

Jesus wants to know from this man whether he wants to get well? Notice his answer, "Sir, I don't have anyone here to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up. Here he is hoping, but feeling totally helpless.

His answer implies he has a “as soon as” mentality. And it is not just him who has it! Many people throughout their lives have a “as soon as” mentality. See if you can recognize yourself for It sounds something like :

“As soon as I
graduate,
get a job,
get a better job.
As soon as I
get married,
get out of this relationship.
As soon as I
I have more time,
more money,
a better house.
As soon as
he changes the way he acts;
she apologizes.
As soon as
I feel better,
get through this time in my life
they do what I want.
As soon as I
get a vacation,
retire,
move to the mountains.
As soon as I
get over this grief,
no longer feel sad;
lose ten pounds,
get in shape.

Meanwhile, life has been put on hold or even passed you by.
The pause button has been pushed, the glorious moment has

passed while we sit on our mat, self-imprisoned by the circumstances of life.

The important thing to notice here is the pool is an illusion; staring at it, we see our life as nothing more than our circumstances.

Please don't get me wrong, I'm not suggesting that the circumstances of our lives are irrelevant or have no effect. That's just not true. They do affect us.

We are, however, more than the circumstances of our life. Life is not to be found outside our various situations or circumstances but within them. To believe something other than this is to live constantly looking for the next pool of Bethzatha.

Jesus does not help the man get into the water. He comes to him on his mat, the same mat and situation the man so wants to escape, and speaks words of life and resurrection. "Stand up, take your mat and walk." The man does not leave his mat behind. It goes with him. His circumstances are real. The difference is he now carries them. They no longer carry him.

Jesus doesn't change our outer circumstances. He changes us. He calls us into a new way of being, seeing, acting, speaking, and thinking. When we stand and rise to that new life we discover the circumstances have somehow changed. That doesn't necessarily make life is easy, nor does it mean we no longer have to deal with the circumstance of life. Yet, now our circumstances are more manageable and we engage them from a different place and position.

In recognizing, standing, and walking on this, the pool of Bethesda is drained of its power over us. There is freedom where there was once imprisonment. Inertia gives way to creativity. Once stagnant waters now bubble with new life.

The life Jesus offers does not happen “as soon as” It happens in this place, at this time, in these circumstances. Are you sitting on your mat? Are you going to be still looking for a pool of Bethesda? Either way you call it, Jesus says the same thing, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.”

(Some ideas in this sermon were taken from a sermon by Michael Marsh at interruptingthesilence.com)