

May 5, 2013

**Scripture Lesson ~ *John 5:1-9***

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be made well?’ 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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Stand up, take your mat and walk.’ At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath.

**Sermon      *Stirring Things Up***

Good morning, I want to add on to the scripture that was read, John 5: verses 10 thru 15. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, ‘It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.’ But he answered them, ‘The man who made me well said to me, “Take up your mat and walk.” ’ They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, “Take up your mat and walk”?’ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.’ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. These are the words of one place, the words of one time, for the people of all places and all times.

It is good to be here with you today, on this day I bring you greetings from all the churches that are part of the Pacific Northwest Conference with the United Church of Christ. For those of you who are wondering, what exactly is a Pacific Northwest Conference of UCC churches? It is those churches that are in Washington State, Northern Idaho and Alaska. It is also made up of two camps, one over in Coeur D’Alene, and Pilgrim Firs over on the Olympic Peninsula. And also one of our affiliates is Horizon House, which is a downtown living community for seniors.

So on all their behalf, I get to bring you greetings on this day. I also get to bring you their thanks, on all the ways you give and share with both your time as well as your financial gifts to the wider church. There are churches in these other places that you help out, when the church is in the midst of searches, you help out

when the church is in the middle of that process, in the same way you were helped when you went thru that same process by other congregations and other churches.

In addition to that, you help to feed people. You help feed people with different programs throughout the United States and throughout the world. The same way you help to have a mission here, there are places that also have a mission where people are being fed where otherwise they would not be fed today, if would not be for those things you shared. Places where there have been disasters in other parts of the world. Some disasters that we never hear about and some that we do. Through those gifts that you give, there are some people that are served there that might not be served if not for those things that you shared. So sisters and brothers, for all those things that you shared and all the ways that you share them, on behalf of your sisters and brothers throughout the United Church of Christ and on behalf of your sisters and brothers throughout the world, thank you, thank you all very much.

Before we move into the sermon, I invite you to pray with me, simply by saying the words that I say, after I say them. So sisters and brothers let us pray.

Dear God, on this day, meet us where we are.

Dear God, on this day, meet us where we are.

Dear God, on this day, meet us where we are. Amen

I met someone who is in the seminary in New York, and in order to pay for his school, he had a job in what he called a Sabbath Assistant. Within New York City there is a strong population who are from more orthodox traditions of Judaism and so he had had different jobs along the way of a Sabbath Assistant. He helped them out in some of the things that they were not allowed to do on the Sabbath. In one of the buildings that had a large orthodox population, for a while he would be hired to be there during the Sabbath so he could press the buttons of the elevator for these folks because within Sabbath that was considered work and that was something that folks were allowed to do on the Sabbath. He also got a job for a while as a driver, because people were not allowed to drive themselves on the Sabbath, so for those folks that did not have a driver themselves, he was able to drive them from home to places of worship. He also worked for someone who had no use of their legs, and on the Sabbath he would push this person in his wheelchair because they were not allowed to push themselves in a wheelchair on the Sabbath because it was considered to be work.

These ideas of the Sabbath, these ideas of what might happen on the Sabbath, could happen on the Sabbath, are deeply engrained within the scripture that we hear today. There was this guy that was sitting by this pool right here. He had been sitting here for 38 years and the idea with the pool came from some Greek understanding, that every time the waters were troubled, by the wind, or

perhaps by a flow of water into that pool unexpectedly the story was and the idea was, that if you were someone who had some sort of disability or illness or otherwise needed forgiveness for you would go to the pool, and those that went to the pool when the waters were troubled, were either healed or had that thing forgiven that needed forgiving. So this person in particular, had not had use of his legs, and he had been sitting by that pool for 38 years. By some assumptions or by some people who have written about the story, every time the waters were troubled, there was a rush by all the folks that were present there to get to that water as quickly as possible. There maybe some jostling to get to that pool to have that feeling that came from that pool. And this person had been sitting there for 38 years, because no one could bring him to that water to have that feeling.

So along comes Jesus and meets the guy that had been sitting by the pool for 38 years who had no use of his legs, and Jesus tells him – Sir, just pick up your mat and walk, and the guy does. He had been sitting there for 38 years, and he is told to pick up his mat and walk. Now part of the reason I read a little farther in the scriptures, is that it was also Sabbath, the day that he said this. So the guy was carrying his mat, and he got in trouble with some of those who were in authority at the time, and at that place, for carrying that mat it was considered to be work, it was not something you were supposed to be doing on the Sabbath. Only that time with God, basically found out who you were in God's eyes, and nothing else. You were not to focus on anything else, so that the fact that he was carrying that mat, meant that he got in trouble. There were a lot of people with Jesus, that wondered if it was okay for him to heal people also on the Sabbath. Whether that was work that should not be done. And so the fact that Jesus did this, meant that Jesus got in a little bit of trouble with some of the authorities at the time. Questioning whether or not this healing should have happened, whether or not this person should have lifted up their mat, questioning whether or not this Jesus person was really the faithful person that they expected him to be, who they wanted Jesus to be. So in this story today, you have this person sitting on the mat, who was not the person who he was supposed to be on that mat. You had this Jesus who was not the Jesus he was supposed to be on that day as an observant person and you had this Sabbath that was not the Sabbath it was supposed to be on this particular day at this particular place according to the times.

In some ways this sounds a little bit foreign at first, that the sounds from another place, another time, but I would just guess that there are some things that happen on Sunday that you come to expect to happen on Sunday, even within your own church, but I am sure it never happens here. But there are certain things you come to expect, if those things don't happen it's not quite Sabbath. Or sometimes it's a particular kind of music, drumming or clapping or something else that when people hear it on Sabbath, it is not quite the Sabbath it's supposed to be. I have

heard some of these things from other churches, and maybe even this Jesus person comes along, and says some things that don't always make us comfortable. That don't always make us comfortable or make us feel good with everything that is happening within our own lives, even everything that we are doing, sometimes this Jesus who has this emphasis of serving those who are poor or broken. Maybe sometimes this Jesus is uncomfortably challenging us. Because we don't always want Jesus to be present with others, because if Jesus is there and we follow Jesus that means we have to go there too. Some ways and some times and some places when we follow Jesus where Jesus goes, are the most uncomfortable places for us.

And then there is this guy who is sitting by the water. Now I don't know about you, but there are things in my life, that are not perfect, that are things in my life that are not whole, there are things that I do, perhaps patterns of behavior, I don't feel so good about, and there are some of these things that I want to change, but maybe the timing isn't quite right. Maybe I need to get this in place and this in place before I do that thing. Maybe my financial situation has to be completely correct until I really share with others that I know that I could share. Or maybe my work situation needs to be in a different way that I give the time to others that I could give. Maybe it is some of the timing of work or some of different pieces that have to change before my prayer life is really good as I want it to be.

And when I am talking about some of the stuff, I am not talking about prayer life as it is separate from ministry, as ministers sometimes have the hardest time with private prayer life themselves. They are good with some of the public prayers but not as good with their personal prayers in that personal studies, as some things are just not right. Maybe there are things in their personal life that could be different, could be better, but maybe there are other behaviors like addiction or other problems or family disputes, but the waters haven't been troubled as yet, or haven't had the help to get there yet.

And along comes this inconvenient Jesus who says, friend pick up your mat and walk! So in today's story we have this Sabbath that is not quite right, we have this Jesus that is not quite right, we have this situation and this moment that is not quite right, and maybe just maybe it's some of that timing that is not quite right, but maybe it is just right, maybe that not just right Sabbath is a just right time that we are open to the Spirit, that God might be moving in a different way that helps us change things that we do on Sabbath, that helps us recognize we might need to do different things on the Sabbath. Maybe it is that not quite right Jesus that does call to us and go to different places than we would normally go, we have to go to places and follow this not quite right Jesus to places where we are sometimes uncomfortable, that are not sometimes right and maybe that not quite right Jesus on that not quite right Sabbath, that looks at us, and looks at who we are, and looks at who we have convinced ourselves we are, who convinces ourselves that maybe

today is the day to pick up that mat and walk, that maybe just may today, even though the timing is not quite right that we change some of those things we needed to change.

Maybe today that family member that we have been estranged from, maybe today is the day we call up that person and say I've missed you. Today is the day if there is a problem with addiction, in our own lives, we make the commitment to call to get help with that. Perhaps today is that day we make a commitment to change our lives as we might still see ourselves as someone who has been sitting there and can't move, but Jesus sees us and sees and sees something very different. A mat, a not quite right person, a not quite right Jesus, on a not quite right Sabbath, Jesus comes along and sees something beautiful, and good and amazing and miraculous in a way that we never expected. Maybe just maybe that not quite right time is really that quite right moment we have been waiting for. Amen.