

Sermon 2007 Easter 6
Text: John 5:1-9
Theme: "Help Me to the Pool"

There was an invalid who lay by the healing pool for 38 years. Supposedly, an angel came from time to time and stirred the waters and the first person into the water would be cured of whatever ills he had. Sadly, this man was lame and could never get to the waters first. For 38 years, people stepped over this man and ignored him.

Jesus sought this man out. He was not responding to a request. The man had not asked to be healed. He was not responding to faith. The man didn't even know who Jesus was. Jesus simply saw someone who needed help and he helped him.

Christ cares deeply about our physical needs. He doesn't just step over us and wish us well. He does something. He doesn't even just forgive our sins and move on, he helps us with the immediate needs we have right then. He heals the deaf man, makes the paralyzed guy pick up his mat and walk, cleans the leper, stops the hemorrhaging for the woman, feeds five thousand people

when they're hungry, raises the dead brother of Mary and Martha. He does whatever people need to feel better.

He loves us. He forgives our sins. But his love for us is not just a spiritual concern. He goes on from there and he shows his love for us. In fact, he gave his own body and blood for us. And that body and blood connects us together so that we in turn do whatever needs to be done for each other.

This weekend we are officially installing our Parish Nurse, Deb Johnson. She has completed her training and although she has been functioning in the role for a while, now we set her aside as one specially commissioned for this task. And what task is that? Primarily it is this. To be the voice of those people by the pool so that they will not be stepped over and ignored for 38 years before someone stops to help them.

How is it, when we are physically connected to one another, that we can so easily ignore parts of the body that are hurting? It is not as though we cannot see them. It is

sin. We think that our time is our own and that we have the prerogative to decide not to give it to another. We think that the hurting member will pull us down and that if we ignore it, it will go away. We prefer to pursue our own selfishness and pleasures and that ever-illusory "fun."

The other night I made my way through the dark living room on my way to the kitchen and I stubbed my little toe on the piano bench. The pain was incredible. In a blinding flash everything stopped. I was bent over, hopping around, flailing my arms and moaning in pain. It was JUST A LITTLE TOE! Completely insignificant in the greater scheme of things. It has hardly any importance to the well being of my body and yet I was incapacitated. We too quickly forget that when even a small and insignificant part of the body is hurt, the whole body is effected.

Jesus says that we are his sheep and his sheep know his voice but then he follows that up by saying that he has other sheep that he must bring to this pen. Other sheep? What do mean by "other sheep" Lord? Surely not sheep

that use drugs, or alcohol. Not sheep that smell bad or don't think too clearly. Not sheep that are old and senile. Not sheep that are young and foolish. Not sheep that are not like us! Not that! But when we step over such people in need, when we turn away from such people, we are turning away from Christ himself.

The Parish Nurse is under the board of Human Care, but I think sometimes she should be under the Board of Stewardship because really that is what she does. She encourages us both to care properly for our health, the greatest asset any of us have and encourages us to use our assets, our money, our abilities and our time to help other parts of the body that are in pain.

It is not our job to help hurting people. Did you hear me? It is not OUR JOB to help hurting people! **IT IS OUR PRIVILEGE.**

When we were dead in our sins, nothing but gangrenous mounds of rotting damned flesh, our Lord picked us and washed us clean in the waters of Baptism.

Then he took us to his table and he fed us with HIS OWN BODY AND BLOOD, to strengthen us. When everyone else would step over us and let us rot, he picked us up and placed us in the pool and we have a choice to make because it is our gift to do with as we like.

Like the nine lepers, we can take the gift and walk away without so much as a word of thanks. Or we can say thanks and make some kind of token offering, a few hundred bucks to the church, a can of soup to the food pantry, our old clothes to the Salvation Army. Or...or we can participate in a corporate life of mercy. We can intentionally look for all who need help, all who are hurting, all who suffer injustice and search for ways to bring them to the same table of mercy from which we ourselves have been fed.

Is it easy? No, nothing about following Jesus is easy, but here is the truth. When we begin sacrificing our selfish desires for the good of others, giving up everything to focus ourselves on getting everyone to the healing pool, we find ourselves throwing off all the sin that so easily entangles us

and the race that we run ceases to be a burden and begins to be a joy. I thought I understood joy at one time in my life. I thought I knew what would bring me joy but as it turns out, I did not. I only began to discover joy when I began to understand mercy.

There came a moment in my life when I was faced with risking everything I had accomplished on this earth for the sake of what is right. By God's grace, I took the risk, but I lost. I lost everything and it was painful. It was horrible, but in so doing, I saw Jesus. In the pit of despair, at the bottom of the well, when you think it cannot get darker...it turns out, that's where Jesus lives. And all the things I thought I had, all the accomplishments I thought I had made turned out to be rubbish compared to the all-surpassing richness of knowing Christ.

I pray that in the coming years, our Parish Nurse will be empowered to empower all of us to completely and unwaveringly enter into the corporate life of mercy in this place. I promise you that once you have cast all the worldly

baggage off, you will never want to pick it up again. Do it.
Begin casting off the baggage. Choose mercy instead of
gain. Choose sacrifice instead of selfishness. Choose Christ
as he has given you the power do. AMEN