

THE MESSAGE**Aug 22, 2010****John 5: 1-18****The Rev. Dr. R. K. Miller*****Broken?***

The lesson for today is from the 5th chapter of the Gospel of John, beginning at verse 1. As I read the text, keep this in mind. This man doesn't know Jesus, doesn't ask for his help, and doesn't have any faith at work here. There isn't any testimony of who Jesus is, no confession of sin, nothing. This man doesn't know Jesus, yet God is at work in his life!

(Read the text John 5:1-18.)

I have been to countless hospitals over the years. My least favorite place to be in the hospital is the ER. Most of the time I have been there to visit someone. On rare occasions I've been there with my children for one reason or another. I'll spare you the details of those visits to the ER.

There is no question in my mind -- the vast majority of nurses, doctors, and medical technicians who work in the ER are gifted, compassionate people, committed to bringing healing and comfort to the sick, and hurting, and broken. People who work in the health care profession especially the ER are to be commended. Let's give them a round of applause here this morning.

Every time I'm in the ER I can't help but look around at the people waiting there with physical and emotional brokenness spanning many different ages, genders, and ethnicities. Seeing people with all kinds of sickness, hurtness (a Rob Miller word), and brokenness waiting for help, waiting for relief, waiting for healing.

Every once in a while, someone from the inner sanctum -- the exam rooms -- comes out, sees the people, looks at a chart, looks back at the crowd, and then takes a little breath. It's at that very moment every person in the room is hoping, praying that the next words spoken out loud will be their name.

Many of us have been there: waiting. Linger in the waiting room of life, waiting for our ship to come in, waiting for the right moment, waiting for our turn. Waiting for our chart to rise to the top, waiting for our name to be called. Waiting... waiting... waiting...

It can be frustrating. It can seem overwhelming. Waiting, especially in the ER, is a scene that gets repeated thousands of times every day and it's been going on for thousands of years!

This scene in our reading from John this morning is a first century ER waiting area. Gathered there are people in all different stages of sickness, hurtness, and brokenness. Waiting for help, relief, and healing. The pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem was

one of many healing pools. In Hebrew, Bethesda means something like “house of mercy” or “house of grace.” John describes people gathered around the pool of Bethesda -- who are sick, weak, ill. He says they are invalids -- the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed.

These are people in need of grace and mercy, relief and healing. They have been tossed aside, marginalized, left to fend for themselves. They gather at healing pools like a modern day ER, waiting; sometimes waiting years, for healing and new life.

Here is how it worked. When the water stirred in the pool, it was believed that an angel of God was nearby and the first person into the water would be healed. So when the water stirred there was a mad scramble to get into the water first, with a lot of pushing and shoving going on. Not only is the last one in a rotten egg, but even the second one in is still a loser.

BUT what does this say about the character and nature of angels?

What does this say about a gracious God who sends the angels to bring God’s healing touch to one and all? This is indeed a warped belief system.

John tells us about one particular patient who has developed a lot of patience over the years. He’s been coming to this pool every day for the past 38 years. Can you imagine sitting in an ER waiting your turn for 38 years? Let that sink in for a moment: 38 years. The nature of his illness is unclear, but whatever it is, it prevents him from getting into the water himself.

One day, Jesus, shows up and simply asks him, “Do you want to be made well?” The man answers (and it’s helpful to have a little whining in your voice when you read this) – “There isn’t anyone to help me into the water when it’s stirred.” Notice, he doesn’t really answer Jesus’ question. Jesus looks at the man and says, “Stand up, take your mat, and walk.” The man listens and obeys Jesus. He stands up, takes his mat, and walks away.

I don’t know about you, but I love this story. It’s filled with a serious struggle that has been going on for a long, long time (38 years) and then a complete transformation and a new life.

I wonder what it would have been like to be there. I can see everyone waiting by the pool watching until the water stirred and then making a mad dash to get into the pool first. A race to be the first one in the healing pool...

Isn’t life just like that? First come, first serve... not so when it comes to matters of faith – and faith matters.

If this is a story about the blind, the lame, the paralyzed then, really, who among us isn’t?

1. Who among us doesn't struggle with at least a limited view of God, and how God works in our lives?
2. Who among us doesn't, from time to time, or maybe much of the time, see God as an angry judge, or someone ready to hand out punishment for all kinds of mistakes?
3. Who among us isn't lame or incapacitated by something in our past, an old message that keeps playing over and over in our mind, holding us hostage to that moment and making it difficult or impossible to move forward?
4. How many of us hobble around with a short-sighted view of an extravagantly gracious and loving God?

Well, I'm here to tell you that the pool is now open and the water will not stop stirring! Come on in, the water's fine. There's no hurry, and there's room for everyone.

Question: Do you want to be healed? How could the answer be anything but yes? Jesus asks the man, "Do you want to be healed?"

The man responds with something about needing someone to get him into the water. Maybe he really doesn't want to be healed! Maybe he has accepted his fate. Maybe he's gotten so comfortable with his brokenness that to change now after all these years would mess up everything!

While he's fumbling around for an answer, Jesus goes ahead and heals the man! The man never said "yes" or "no" to Jesus' question! This man's healing flowed from grace and mercy -- the same grace and mercy that Jesus extends to each one of us.

Consider this: The man doesn't have to measure up; he doesn't have to pass a test or prove his faith. He doesn't have to give the right answer. And the answer he does give is not the answer to the question. And neither do we!

Maybe... when Jesus asks us if we want to be healed, it's already happening and we don't even know it. We can't even comprehend it. Whether we want to be healed or not Jesus wants us to be healed. Jesus doesn't ask permission to heal us and it isn't a rhetorical question about being healed. It's grace. That's how grace is.

The gift of God's grace isn't dependant on something we do. It isn't about us measuring up, or passing the test, or proving our faith, or getting it right. If it were, then it wouldn't be a gift of grace. The answer to the question "do you want to be healed?" is "yes! Yes, Lord, I want to be healed!"

Well, I'm here to tell you that the pool is now open and the water will not stop stirring! Come on in, the water's fine. There's no hurry, and there's room for everyone.

I want to point out one more thing here this morning and that is -- hope. The man never gave up hope on being healed, restored, given new life. He just never expected it from Jesus. He had hope that once in the water, once he got into the pool, he would be healed - a new man - restored.

What he didn't count on – and what we sometimes fail to count on – is the power of God showing up in our lives in the one named Jesus. When Jesus shows up and the power of God is set loose in our lives, everything changes.

The man believed his healing, his fate, rested on having someone else help him into the pool. But there's the twist for us to consider, how could it be that this man had gone 38 years without someone stepping into his life to help him get into the pool? How could it be that no one had been the hands and feet and heart and soul of Jesus -- the living power of God, in this man's life?

Think about your life.

- How many times has someone stepped into your life with the healing touch of Christ?
- How many times has someone showed up with the right word, the right touch, the right presence at just the right time?
- Do you ever have that experience when you're lost in your own stuff -- feeling a bit sorry for yourself, and by some action of giving to someone else you wind up receiving the very thing you were looking for?

That's how God does it. God is calling us to help someone else into the pool today -- into the pool of God's grace and mercy. God is calling us to become agents of God's healing touch in the lives of others.

We are in this thing called life together and our faith matters. Our actions matter. So consider this...

The waiting is over -- the pool of God's grace is now open and the water will not stop stirring! Come on in, the water's fine. There's no hurry, and there's room for everyone. That's the invitation from Jesus who goes to extravagant lengths to show us God's love and grace and mercy and forgiveness.

Come on in and be healed. God is at work in your life through Jesus. And then pick up you mat and walk on this our Sabbath. Amen.