

## **BUMC Weekly Bible and Sermon Study**

**Sermon:** “A House of Mercy” (from the “Cross Culture” Lenten sermon series)

**Scripture:** John 5:1-18

### **Key take-aways from the Scripture**

- In this section of the Book of John, Jesus is on His way to Jerusalem to attend a “festival of the Jews.” Here, Jesus passes by a pool in Sheep Gate known as Bethesda (v.2). This is a spot where many invalids (blind, lame, paralyzed) gathered and lay around at. Jesus comes across a man who had been ill for thirty-eight years and asked (v. 6) “Do you want to be made well?”. The sick man replied to Jesus, “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 told him to get up, take his mat, and walk to the water.
- This healing took place on the Sabbath, which created a stir among the Jewish leaders there because it is not lawful for the man to get up and carry his mat to the water. The NRSV Cultural Backgrounds Study Bible commentary explains, “Working on the Sabbath was in principle a capital offense (Numbers 15:32-36). Jewish tradition specified carrying a load as a form of work, and the man’s critics here view him as violating the interpretation of the law.”
- In verse 14, Jesus catches up to the man that He healed and said, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.” Similar to what we saw with the Samaritan woman at the well in John 4, Jesus is addressing not just the physical need but also the spiritual need of man’s relationship to God.
- In verses 15-18, the man left and told the Jews that he was healed by Jesus. They began to collectively persecute Jesus for performing these miracles on the Sabbath. Jesus replies to them by saying, “My Father is still working, and I also am working.” To maintain the work of creation and sustain life itself, Jewish tradition recognized that God works on the Sabbath. Thus, Jesus uses this as the basis to continue His works of grace and healing on the Sabbath. From this, they became infuriated that Jesus was not only performing miracles on the Sabbath, but that He also making Himself to be equal to God by declaring Himself the Son of God.

### Key take-aways from the Sermon

- We've been looking at encounters that Jesus had on the way to the cross. From Nicodemus the Pharisee to the Samaritan woman that came to Jesus at the well, and now Jesus encounters a sick man at the pool of Bethesda (meaning *house of mercy*).
- Bethesda was a hub for the disabled because the waters were thought to heal those that were ill. People with a common need often find strength in shared suffering...we call these support groups. People with a common need find great strength in shared suffering!
- "Wounded Healer" (Henri J.M. Nouwen): "When our wounds cease to be a source of shame, and become a source of healing, we become wounded healers."
- The theology of divine retribution: whenever anything bad happens to you, it must be due to your sin or imputed sin. As the biblical understanding of God begins to unfold, supremely in Jesus Christ, we gain a deeper clarity that God does not distance Godself from our need but draws closer to us in our woundedness.
- At the Bethesda pool, Jesus encounters a man who had been there for 38 years! He knew of this man's suffering, just as He knows each of ours. Jesus *knows*!
- Jesus asks the sick man (in verse 6) "Do you want to be made well?" It's hard to help someone who does not want it...but this man wants it! He needs a miracle!
- Jesus tells him to pick up his mat and walk...and he does. The problem is this healing occurred on the Sabbath. The religious leaders asked the man who did this and were more concerned with the Sabbath Law than they were his lame legs and healing.
- Instead of celebrating a miracle the elders were more worried about religious regulation than spiritual regeneration.
- Judaism defined their communal identity around three practices: (1) circumcision; (2) food laws; and (3) Sabbath observance. Back then, when you challenge the Sabbath law you were challenging the covenant identity and membership.
- With His reply, Jesus is both breaking the Sabbath rule and making Himself equal to God! This was a capital crime, and they are now looking for a way to get rid of Jesus.
- Sometimes without even knowing it, the religious institution can reject Jesus. When you are more interested in preserving the institution than proclaiming the incarnation, we have become spiritually lame.
- Christ is the head of the church, and while we may not know what is happening, He does. Many of us look and act like Jesus, and when we do, the church begins to look and act like a house of mercy.

### Questions for Personal Reflection or Group Discussion

- What were your key take-aways from the sermon? How can you apply this to your everyday life?
- According to the Jewish leaders, what two laws did Jesus violate in the text?
- Do you think that Jesus purposely made the man give the appearance of breaking the Law by picking up his mat and walking to the pool during Sabbath? Why?
- Why was the Jewish leader's response not being pleased for the man's healing but rather concerned that he was violating the Sabbath by carrying his mat?
- Compare and contrast this situation with that of the woman of Samaria in John 4:5-42. How are these stories similar? How are they different? What do they teach us about Jesus?
- In what ways can you put your *woundedness* to be used in the service of others?
- What does Rev. Dr. Chappell mean when he says, "The church is divinely instituted"? How does the church differ from other institutions?
- Is what you are living for *worth* what Christ has died for?



## NOTES

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