



**Day 6 | Tuesday, March 12, 2024**  
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John chapter 5 describes a turning point in Jesus' journey and ministry. Throughout chapters 1 through 4 we are told Jesus upholds many titles, all of which reveal and identify Jesus as Messiah. And while many in John's Gospel continue to profess and reveal the identity of Jesus, John chapter 5 marks the beginning of a shift where Jesus will be increasingly rejected, hated and opposed by religious and Roman leaders.

In the introduction to the passage, we are told Jesus goes to the pool of Beth-zatha which means "house of mercy." This is a site in which people suffering from illness would enter the waters when they stirred with the hopes of being healed by the mercy of God. But as Jesus gazes upon the scene at the pool, we come to know that there are some barriers for healing because a man has been waiting 38 years to be healed and the scripture says there are many suffering people laying on the perimeter of the pool awaiting God's mercy.

In verse 6, Jesus asks the man who has been ill for 38 years a question that is honestly quite shocking and rude. He says to the man, "Do you want to be made well?" What we know about Jesus' curing or healing people in the gospel of John is that it is done to reveal the power of Jesus' glory. So, with this in mind, we must understand that the question was likely asked with the

purpose of revealing something about the nature of Jesus to us. Its shock factor is intentional to grab our attention immediately and biblical scholar Warren Carter argues that the question is not only aimed at revealing Jesus as Messiah but exposing the injustices of the Roman Empire. And based on the man's answers to Jesus, I tend to agree that Carter is correct, the intention of the question is to expose.

The man does not directly answer Jesus' question about his desire to be made well. Instead, he begins to profess the barriers to his healing. And what I hear in his response is signs and symptoms of the impact of an empire that has sold him an idea of perfection and holiness that is unattainable and distracts him from gazing towards Jesus. In verse 7, the man articulates the reason he cannot be healed is because one, there is no one to put him in the pool when the water is stirred and two, when he attempts to get into the pool someone always steps in front of him. I imagine as he shares this response with Jesus, his eyes are transfixed on the water still waiting for the pool to stir and his opportunity to experience mercy. I am heartbroken as I contemplate what this man's answer symbolizes. Empire is good at distracting us from the One true God and making us feel deeply isolated, afraid, incapable and like we are not Beloved. This pool is named the "house of mercy" and yet we know that is not possible until Mercy himself walks into the space to experience the fullness of God's complete love. But even as Jesus is right there next to this man, empire has such a hold on his expectations for himself and what is possible for his life that he does not engage Jesus wholly.

This man's infatuation with empire is so relatable. Nearly ten years ago I was diagnosed with chronic illnesses. My fears and beliefs were much like the man at the pool. I am not good enough echoed in my mind daily and I began to self-isolate because God forbid anyone realize I am disabled and act in the world differently than our own empire deems as good. In my isolation, I would meditate on my own pool waters, which were really images of the "ideal" able bodied person trying to figure out how to mimic these models so at least I could pretend I was perfect and holy. Doing this completely distracted me from God and specifically the title God gave me as Beloved.

Empire can appear so appealing that we may never come to look Jesus in the face. We know from the text that even after Jesus commands the man to stand and walk that he still does not know Jesus. In verse 12, authorities ask the man who gave him permission to stand and walk, to which he replies I do not know. While Jesus' question exposes the injustice of the system this man endures, Jesus' behaviors also reveal his own nature. Jesus acted upon this man on the Sabbath. The only being who was allowed to perform services related to the body on the Sabbath was God. So, in and through his action, Jesus reveals his relationship to God. This creates fear and outrage amongst

the religious leaders and authorities because they are now being confronted with the reality that a true and genuine power exists that can dismantle and destroy empire. In the presence of Jesus they become powerless and exposed for their sinfulness, while Jesus is elevated for his love and justice.

What leaves me in awe and gives me hope in this passage is that whether or not we acknowledge and recognize Jesus, he still acts out of love and mercy on our behalf to liberate us from the things that imprison and harm us. This is truly humbling and overwhelming, but I think we are called to more. I imagine that the formerly ill man from the pool stands and walks away a bit aloof. Maybe after Jesus' death it dawns on him the importance of Jesus. My sadness for this man is that he may carry on still desiring the trivialities of empire, never delighting in the perfect love of Jesus. I know for myself my gaze was only re-oriented toward God when someone intervened on my behalf, sometimes we need accompaniment to be drawn away from worldly desires. That person was my dad. Months after my diagnosis I sat before him, eyes gazing at the floor in shame, lamenting, "Dad, I try so hard to be good enough. No matter how hard I pretend to be like everyone else and perfect, I still do not have the things the world promises." He spoke to the core of my being saying, "God loves you so much." In all honesty, this was a very strange response, but it felt like a divine whisper. In that moment, my gaze lifted from the pool and met my father's eyes. In his eyes I finally saw myself as created with purpose, set apart and beloved by a God who offers so much more than anything empire could promise.

We are called to intimate relationship with God. As our world becomes so much more focused on profit, progress and power, I think we are invited to remind one another who calls us Beloved through our words and actions. So, on my final day of preaching for this Novena of Grace, I want to leave you with a final encouragement and that is: God loves you so much.