

Reflection John 5: 1-9

Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord our strength and our redeemer. Amen.

Thirty-eight years is a long time to sit on your mat. Every day is the same. Waiting. Watching. Hoping. Not much changes. Sitting on his mat has become a way of life for the man in today's gospel. His life is stagnant. He's unable to see that the deep well of life is within him. He's convinced that life will bubble up outside of him, over there, in that magic pool of water. So, he sits on his mat waiting, watching, and hoping that things will change.

There was a belief that this pool of water called Bethzatha had healing properties and that it could change one's life. It was said that every now and then an angel would stir the water, the water would begin to bubble, and the first one in the water would be healed. The man in today's gospel won't get up off his mat until he sees the first bubble. He is living an 'as soon as' life.

'As soon as the water bubbles then I will get up off my mat. As soon as I get to the water my life will be better. As soon as I get into the water my problems will be fixed.'

The pool of Bethzatha is an illusion. It convinces us that our life is nothing more than our circumstances. It deceives us into believing that life is to be found outside ourselves. It tricks us into living an 'as soon as' life. Most of us know what that is like. We say to ourselves or maybe even out loud to another, 'As soon as this or that happens everything will be better. I'll be happy. My problems will go away. I'll be satisfied. All will be well.'

The pool of Bethzatha has a strong attraction for us. Children often say, 'As soon as I get big, grow up, am an adult' It continues throughout our life. 'As soon as'

I graduate, get a job, get a better job;

I get married or get out of this relationship;

I have more time, more money, a better house;

He changes the way he acts;

I lose ten pounds, get in shape!!

'As soon as' You can fill in the blank with almost anything. The problem is there will always be another pool of Bethzatha.

Meanwhile life has been put on hold. The pause button has been pushed. We sit on our mat, self-imprisoned by the circumstances of our life.

The imprisonment is so great that when Jesus asks the man, 'Do you want to be made well?' the man doesn't even say, 'Yes.' Instead, he offers circumstances and excuses. 'I have no one to put me in the water. When the water bubbles others get there first'

I'm not suggesting that the circumstances of our lives are irrelevant or have no effect. That's just not true. They do affect us. We are, however, more than the circumstances of our life. Life is not to be found outside our various situations or circumstances but within them. To believe something other than this is to live constantly looking for the next pool of Bethzatha.

Jesus does not help the man get into the water. He comes to him on his mat, the same mat and situation the man so wants to escape and speaks words of life and resurrection. 'Get up off your mat!' To quote Jesus a bit more accurately, 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.' The

man does not leave his mat behind. It goes with him. His circumstances are real. The difference is he now carries them. They no longer carry him.

Jesus doesn't change our outer circumstances. He changes us. He calls us into a new way of being, seeing, acting, speaking, thinking. When we stand and rise to that new life, we discover the circumstances have somehow changed. That doesn't necessarily make life easy or mean we no longer have to deal with the circumstances of life. It makes our circumstances more manageable, and we engage them from a different place and position. The pool of Bethzatha is drained of its power over us. There is freedom where there was once imprisonment. Inertia gives way to creativity. Once stagnant waters now bubble with new life.

The life Jesus offers does not happen 'as soon as' It happens in this place, at this time, in these circumstances. Are you sitting on your mat? Are you looking for a pool of Bethzatha? 'Stand up, take your mat and walk.'

Amen

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