

Sixth Sunday of Easter

House of Hesus

John 5:1-9

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Analysis by Paul Jaster

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

2Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. 3In these lay many invalids – blind, lame, and paralyzed. 5One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be made well?” 7The sick man answered him, “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.” 8Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” 9At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath.

DIAGNOSIS: House of Shame

Step 1: Initial Diagnosis (External Problem) : *Lame Love*

Shame on us! Not much mercy (hesed) is being shown at the pool near the Sheep Gate, belying its name Bethesda (Beth-hesed), “House of Mercy.” Pushing and shoving to get in first. A stirring of the waters that only benefits the strong and the befriended, not the weak and friendless. A disabled man who is

so tired of waiting for someone to help and who has become so discouraged and jaded across the years that Jesus has to ask him, "Do you want to be healed?" It is the question Jesus asks of us in our unhealthy situations when a saving-out is staring us right in the face. Ironically, an alternative meaning of "hesed" is "shame" or "dis-grace." And so, Bethesda can also mean a "House of Shame/Disgrace." Which is exactly what this place had become...for this man...in this situation.

Step 2: Advanced Diagnosis (Internal Problem) : *Lame Excuses*

Instead of just saying, "Yes! I do want to be healed," the Limpy Larry/Louise in us makes excuses and shoves the blame on to someone else—a nameless "no one" who is "everyone". And instead of using the Sabbath day to thank God for all healings through Jesus, the religious snob in us excuses our condescending prejudices towards the invalid with a lame understanding of God's law, when it is our lack of love and trust in God's Christ that God finds so "unlawful." What do you want to bet that God (just like our personal MD) hears from us a million excuses every day of why we are not following our Savior's healing prescription, which is to trust in his death and resurrection, rise, take up our mat and walk?

Step 3: Final Diagnosis (Eternal Problem) : *A Worse Paralysis*

There is something far more disabling than blindness, lameness, or paralysis. Refusing to receive and live in Christ's healing word leads to something "worse," Jesus says (5:14). A greater sin. The sin of refusing to receive God's mercy at its best and, therefore, the refusing to receive in the long run God's own gracious self offered in Christ. What a shame! This is our ultimate illness and un-wellness.

PROGNOSIS: House of Mercy

Step 4: Initial Prognosis (Eternal Solution) : *Jesus Makes Well*

Despite the invalid's disability and our lame love, lame faith,

lame hope, a “good shepherd” appears by the “sheep gate” who “saw,” “found,” and “healed” even without being asked. Just follow the fluid flow in Saint John’s Gospel. The Jesus, who was crucified (and raised!) for it, gives a “living water” that does what John’s baptism (chapter 1), ritual purification (chapter 2), proselyte baptism (chapter 3), Jacob’s well water (chapter 4), the water of the popular healing cults (chapter 5), and the water of Sukkoth (chapter 7) could not do. In fact, it just gushes from his side (19:34). On the cross, Jesus takes on our shame and disgrace and replaces it with God’s mercy. And it’s “Like Father, Like Son.” Jesus is doing what our God-Father does—gives life to those whom he wishes and raises the dead. And the good news is that he wishes to give life to all the Limpy Larry’s and Limpy Louise’s of life—life’s “invalids” —of which there are “many.”

Step 5: Advance Prognosis (Internal Solution) : *Rise, Roll Up Your Excuses & Walk*

Like a doctor’s visit, being touched by Jesus doesn’t have much of a lasting benefit without some follow-through and cooperation on the patient’s part. Or, as the risen Christ says to the seven churches (Revelation 2-3) repeatedly, “endurance.” There is a life-style commensurate with the resurrection life, which starts by responding, “Yes, I do want to be made well,” and by trusting in Christ’s death and resurrection rather than in our own feeble prescriptions for self-help. And it continues by being connected to a family of faith, a bunch of hope-filled friends, who are healthy for us. There is a “walk” that goes with the “talk” of, “Rise, roll up the bed of excuses you’ve been lying on; see, you have been made well.”

Step 6: Final Prognosis (External Solution) : *A House of Mercy*

Those who walk the talk become a “house of mercy”. A royal household akin to the Father, Son, and Spirit. Dripping wet from our own immersion into Christ’s death and resurrection, and

stirred by the Spirit of Christ, the baptized flow down a path of love and grace (hesed) that pours and pools us into the “crowd” where Jesus is “hidden” now to become an able friend in time of need. And we boldly and unashamedly name the name that heals us—Jesus Christ our Savior and Lord. A ministry of healing! That’s what a “House of Hesed” does when it truly is mercy—God’s good grace.

[Note: Although some versions (including the NRSV) use the variant “Bethzatha,” Qumran’s Copper Scroll indicates that the name of the pool most likely was “Bethesda.”]