

May 22, 2022

6th Easter Year C

Acts 16: 9-15

Psalm 67

John 5: 1-9

John 5:1-9

After Jesus healed the son of the official in Capernaum, there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids-- blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. When 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?" The 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." Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath.

"In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen."

Our gospel reading today ducks back into the early days of Jesus' ministry, and the writer of John offers us a story of healing. Jesus and his friends are in Jerusalem, as devout Jews attending a festival there.

They go to an area where invalids--folks weighed down with all sorts of illnesses, disabilities, injuries, afflictions, burdens, sufferings--came in hopes that they would be healed by entering the pool of water there. But they would not just enter the water at a random time, the invalids had to enter it when they saw that an angel had stirred up the water, when ripples appeared on the water, and only the first person to enter the pool would be healed.

What an awful means for healing! It is intrinsically competitive, and thus likely led to much pushing and elbowing to try, at each stirring of the waters, to be first into the pool. I can only be healed if you are not.

And Jesus approaches one man at the pool. This man had been ill for 38 years; think back. This man became ill, 38 years ago, for us that means his suffering began in 1984. He has been deeply burdened for a long time.

Jesus asks the man if he wants to be made well, and the man offers a practical but limited reply. He says that he has no helper, no friend to put him in the pool. And without a friend who can carry him, the man has absolutely no chance of being first into the pool. For the man his suffering is unchangeable, hopeless.

And Jesus, looks beyond the current hopelessness, and invites the man to get up and walk, not to the pool of competition, not to the established system, but to pick up his mat and walk away. And the man does, walking a path he could not have imagined, walking away from all that said his situation was hopeless, finding an unexpected, different healing.

I have had a quote on my desk for several months, that came from a discussion in the Friday Book Group that meets on Zoom.

Alert parishioners noticed that there was a quote on the cover of the bulletin last week, that I never mentioned in the sermon or service. And now this week, that quote is there again!

The quote comes from an article about a French Jesuit priest named Pierre Teilhard de Chardin. This man was featured in the book *Sacred Earth Sacred Soul* written by John Philip Newell, and read by the book group.

The Jesuit priest, de Chardin, was born in 1881 and died in 1955. He was both a priest and a paleontologist, and he was brought up and taught to view the earth and nature as less than the world of spirit, from heaven, from the ethereal.

Yet, de Chardin was drawn to all of creation and found God in both the ethereal and in the world, in the magnificence and details of nature, and in the lives and sufferings of humans.

His beliefs developed to include questioning the doctrine of original sin and turning away from all that was imperial in the Catholic Church, and he was often reprimanded by his superiors. Finally, after efforts to stop de Chardin from writing and teaching, he was exiled to the United States and told that he was forbidden to speak publicly or publish his writings.

Exiled, ridiculed, and silenced, de Chardin was deeply burdened and suffering.

At the pool waiting for the waters to be stirred by an angel, we must remember that suffering can take many forms. But like the man Jesus invited to walk away from the pool, de Chardin walked away and continued to live

and care and invite others to God's love.

Which brings us to the quote on the cover of our bulletins. A woman named Jean Houston met de Chardin when she was 14 years old.

I'll let her tell a bit of their first encounter:

When I was about fourteen I was seized by enormous waves of grief over my parents' breakup. I had read somewhere that running would help dispel anguish, so I began to run to school every day down Park Avenue in New York City. I was a great big overgrown girl (5 feet eleven by the age of eleven) and one day I ran into a rather frail old gentleman in his seventies and knocked the wind out of him. He laughed as I helped him to his feet and asked me in French- accented speech, "Are you planning to run like that for the rest of your life?"

"Yes, sir" I replied. "It looks that way."

"Well, Bon Voyage!" he said.

"Bon Voyage!" I answered and sped on my way.

About a week later I was walking down Park Avenue with my fox terrier, Champ, and again I met the old gentleman.

"Ah." he greeted me, "my friend the runner, and with a fox terrier. I knew one like that years ago in France. Where are you going?"

"Well, sir." I replied, "I'm taking Champ to Central Park."

"I will go with you." he informed me. "I will take my constitutional."

And thereafter, for about a year or so, the old gentleman and I would meet and walk together often several times a week in Central Park. He had a long French name but asked me to call him by the first part of it, which was "Mr. Tayer" as far as I could make out.

The walks were magical and full of delight. Not only did Mr. Tayer seem to have absolutely no self-consciousness, but he was always being seized by wonder and astonishment over the simplest things. He was constantly and literally falling into love. I remember one time when he suddenly fell on his knees, his long Gallic nose raking the ground, and exclaimed to me, "Jeanne, look at the caterpillar. Ahhhh!" I joined him on the ground to see what had evoked so profound a response that he was seized by the essence of caterpillar. "How beautiful it is", he remarked, "this little green being with its wonderful funny little feet. Exquisite! Little furry body, little green feet on

the road to metamorphosis." He then regarded me with equal delight.

"Jeanne, can you feel yourself to be a caterpillar?"

"Oh yes." I replied with the baleful knowing of a gangly, pimply faced teenager.

"Then think of your own metamorphosis." he suggested. "What will you be when you become a butterfly, une papillon, eh? What is the butterfly of Jeanne?" (What a great question for a fourteen-year-old girl!) His long, gothic, comic-tragic face would nod with wonder. "Eh, Jeanne, look at the clouds! God's calligraphy in the sky! All that transforming. moving, changing, dissolving, becoming. Jeanne, become a cloud and become all the forms that ever were....."

It was wonderful. People of all ages followed us around, laughing—not at us but with us. Old Mr. Tayer was truly diaphanous to every moment and being with him was like being in attendance at God's own party, a continuous celebration of life and its mysteries.....

As I later found out, he was undergoing at that time the most excruciating agony that there is—the agony of utter disempowerment and psychological crucifixion. And yet to me he was always so present—whimsical, engaging, empowering. How could that be?

I think it was because Teilhard had what few Church officials did—the power and grace of the Love that passes all understanding.

("Mr. Tayer" Jean Houston)

In the midst of his own great suffering de Chardin knew God's healing and continued to live and to know and share God's love.

And so we return to the quote on our bulletin.

Jean Houston went on in the article to say:

But perhaps the most extraordinary thing about Mr. Tayer was the way that he would suddenly look at you. He looked at you with wonder and astonishment joined to unconditional love joined to a whimsical regarding of you as the cluttered house that hides the holy one.

I love this quote! Especially after the yard sale yesterday at Trinity, I'm keenly aware of the image of our cluttered houses!

Suffering can be mental, spiritual, physical; it can last a day, a month, or 38 years. Our suffering is part of our own cluttered houses that always holds

and hides the holy one.

May we, in the midst of our own sufferings, know and offer to others the love that passes all understanding.

Amen.