



This Time I'm Gonna Get It!! (John 5: 1-9, 16-18)

As some of you know, for the past month or so, Christy and I have been getting up in the morning and going to YMCA to exercise. Now believe it or not, the Y is a bustling place at 7:30 in the morning. There are folks walking and riding bikes and lifting weights and taking aerobics and yoga classes, and doing a very painful and masochistic thing on a little skinny bicycle with a very unpadded seat called "spinning."

I did that a few times and decided I would rather be able to walk the rest of the day so it might be good if I started with something a little less intense... Christy always enjoys doing the hardest things and taking the classes and one morning she invited me to attend one with her... It was a "Step Aerobics" class and it was filled with women of all shapes, sizes, and ages. As we gathered for the class, Christy mentioned that she particularly liked this instructor and her classes.. This made me shudder because I know that if Christy likes an aerobics instructor that means that she is probably going to feel like a Drill Sergeant from 29 Palms. But I was already committed to I stretched my calf muscles and prepared to join in.

And indeed when the instructor walked in and dropped her bag on the floor. I could tell we were in for a butt kicking 45 minutes... She was a tall lean woman named Regina whose hair was braided in tight cornrows and who looked like she didn't have an ounce of fat on her body. I noticed her "New York Liberty" jacket, and Christy whispered that she may have actually been on the World Champion New York Liberty professional women's basketball team...and that she now worked full-time as a teacher and personal trainer.

As we geared up for the class. A woman in a designer sweatsuit who was sprawled out on the floor remarked that it was "A little warm" in the room. So Regina, nodded, and began to walk around the room turning on the fans that were mounted up on the wall high in the corners. When she got to the last one, the cord was tangled up high around the back of the fan a good eight or nine feet off the floor. She jumped and tried to grab it.. and then jumped and tried to grab it again. She tried a third and fourth time and just couldn't quite get to it. "Well I guess we'll have to do with three..." She smiled and walked up to take her place in front of the class.

"You know what we need?!" said the woman in the sweatsuit who was still sprawled out on the floor. "We need a big tall man to help us!" Christy rolled her eyes at me and we both glanced up front in time to watch the smile draining from Regina's face.

She put her hands on her hips and walked around in a little circle rolling her head as if she was stretching her neck out with her jaw sticking out. She shook each of her legs out and her hamstrings rippled as she walked passed Christy and I back into the corner across the room from the corner where the tangled cord was. She looked up at the cord and then over at the woman sprawled on the floor. And then she looked up at the cord,



and then over at Christy and I and with her eyes flashing and determination on her face and said ... “Alright that’s it. This time I’m gonna get it..”

She waved us all back out of her way and took a running jump and sailed up into the air. With a flick of her hand, she grabbed the cord and pulled it down and landed on the floor in a graceful movement. Triumphantly she plugged in the fan and switched it on and returned to the front of the class with a smile on her face and little extra spring in her step...

Sometimes we have to reach down deep inside ourselves to find the strength to get the job done in our lives. Particularly when we are faced with seemingly impossible challenges. In our scripture reading this morning Jesus helps a man face such an impossible challenge and completely uninvited, he helps him reach down inside himself to do that very thing. In our scripture reading this morning we encounter Jesus in Jerusalem near “the Sheep Gate” where there is a pool called Bethzatha or Bethesda depending on the translation we use. And according to Hellenistic folk tradition there was a belief that the pool of Bethzatha, which was unearthed by archeologists on the outskirts of Jerusalem in the latter part of the 19th Century had mysterious healing powers. Folklore had it that there was some kind of divine being would stir up the waters at random times and when this happened, the first one into the water when it was stirred up would be healed.

Now of course later biblical scribes had issues with divine beings from Hellenistic folk traditions being in stories with Jesus so they penciled in the idea that it was an Angel of the Lord that would “trouble” or “stir up” the water in the pool not some other Hellenistic deity just for clarification. (Which is why in your bible, if you are looking at anything but a King James, there you will probably be several footnotes at the bottom that say things like “Other ancient authorities add...”)

But at any rate, you can imagine that the Bethzatha pool attracted people from far and wide who wanted to be healed no matter who or what was stirring the waters. There were probably hundreds of people with various ailments mental, emotional, and physical ailments hanging around in the seven porticos around this pool waiting and watching for something to happen in the water. And with human nature being as it is, you can bet that everyone was jockeying for position around the pool, and watching for the slightest movement so they could jump the gun, and that everytime the breeze blew and made ripples in the water, or a waterbug grazed the top there was probably a massive stampede as hundreds of people splashed into the pool in which arms were broken, heads were knocked together, people were trampled, and absolute chaos ensued.

As Jesus came by this place he encounters a man who has been lying by the pool for a long time. John tells us he has been ill for 38 years. We don’t know how old the man is, or what his illness is. But apparently it makes it difficult for him to walk. Jesus looks at him and asks one simple question, “Do you want to be made well?” Now this might seem like a strange question to us because we would probably guess that anyone who came around the pool of Bethzatha and hung out all day wanted to be made well. But I want you to clue in on the nuance of the situation. Listen to what the man tells Jesus



when he asks him if he wants to be made well. Instead of answering a resounding “Yes!” he falls into something many of us do... He begins to play victim... And instead of saying Yes! To being healed, he makes excuses to Jesus about why he can’t be healed.. Can’t you just hear him looking pitifully up at Jesus and saying, “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 always steps in front of me!”

Oh church! How many times do we get ourselves into trouble with this kind of behavior! Jesus offers us grace that is freely given. Like that man by the pool, we don’t ask for it. We are just hanging out doing our thing. And Jesus walks up repetitively and offers us the tremendous grace of God and we miss it because we are whining, and griping, and moving from the places where we have been victimized and refusing to be healed.

It usually comes out something like this... Jesus hands us grace... The holy spirit moves and we look at the grace that is moving and say things like, “Well we can’t do this because we are declining, or we are too old, or we are too tired, or because we don’t have the money” Or maybe “I can’t serve in a church office because of the hurt and abuse I had to endure last time,” or I can’t take the steps to rectify this situation with my children, spouse, partner, boss, or whoever because I just don’t know what would happen... Or maybe we jump back into the past and say “well our giving is down because of violations of trust,” or “we are very discouraged and hurt because our former pastor made a big mess and violated our trust, and violated our sense of safety, and didn’t act like we all expect a pastor to act. Church this is all fine to admit. And it is important for us to bring out into the open for the healing to begin. But what happens when we are still invoking it 3, 5, 15, and 38 years later? And hanging onto it for dear life. That church is not about healing. That is about playing victim. And we cannot move with power to spread the gospel we have been entrusted with if we are moving from a place of victimization. And when we are playing victim you can be 100% sure you are not practicing the most essential act of our faith.... And That is forgiveness.

Now some of you who work in playing victim like an artistic medium or leave teeth and claw marks in everything you try to let go of will want to argue about this. For some reason you find you want to hang onto that hurt like a pitbull “When I am angry at that person I feel a sense of control in this out of control situation that is/was their fault in the first place.” Or maybe you say, “Well if I forgive so and so for the terrible things that he/she did then I am just saying what he did to me is alright..”

No it wasn’t alright. We are not saying it is alright when we forgive. What we are saying is that we need to let go of it and stop giving it power over our lives because when we hang onto it keeps us stuck.. stuck in the same place sometimes for three or 4, or 15 or even maybe even as long as 38 years.

So I ask you today church as Jesus asks you now, “Do you want to be made well?” Do you want to be made whole? If so, stop blaming your family, others in the congregation, your former mentally ill pastor, your life circumstances, and God... And do what our Savior says. “Stand up! Pick up your mat... And walk.”



And you may be saying... Oh Pastor Jeanne, I just can't do it. Somebody is gonna step in front of me, somebody is gonna hurt me again, they weren't there for me, nobody is here to help me when I need to go down to the pool when the water is stirred up. I can't depend on anybody. They hurt me, they hurt my husband, they hurt my family, I can't trust another pastor, I can't trust these people when they have dropped the ball, and let me down. So, I'll just sit here. Its safer to sit here. And I'll not make any waves.

But what also happens is that not making any waves means making big waves... because the resentment builds, and the bitterness builds, and we all get to simmer and stew and murmur with each other and feel sorry for ourselves and talk about being victims some more. And when we do this, when we refuse to let go, when we refuse to forgive, we die and the church dies. And the gospel dies in our hands as surely as if we have hammered the nails into Jesus hands.

Church I know this is hard stuff. But as Jesus stands here with us with his grace washing over us we are being called to Stand up! He is calling us to pick up our mats! He is calling us to forgive each other and forgive ourselves and move forward and stop feeling sorry for ourselves, and stop acting like victims. And yes We are called to walk! We have got to reach down deep within ourselves not just walk, but back up in the corner and run hard and take that leap up to these forgiveness challenges that feel so unreachable that are choking the life our of our community and say "Alright that's it! With God's help...This time I am gonna get it! This time I am gonna forgive it! And this time I am gonna let go of it!

Church are you ready to do it this morning? Are you ready to take that flying leap! Are you ready to take up your mats! Are you ready to walk? Each of you have been provided with Pencils and Sheets of paper. I want you to take a moment and write down the things and people that you need to forgive and let go of this morning. What is keeping you stuck! What is keeping each of us, and us as a church community thinking of ourselves as victims so we can't move into the world and spread the gospel with power. I want you to write those things, those names, down and then we are going to come forward one by one. And we are going to take up our mats and Walk up here and we are going to put these things in this paper shredder and we are going to let go and let God so we can move forward and do what we are called to do. Abide with God, love our neighbors, love ourselves, and spread the gospel with compassion, with joy, and with power...

And I know the perfect song to sing while we are doing it... Lets sing we are walking in the light of God. You don't need the hymnal. You know the words. I'll lead while we stand up and take up our mats and walk together today...