

Easter VI Year C

“Sir I have no one to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up.”

This is one of those passages in John that tips us off that this Gospel has more than one author...Here the action is concise, staccato...very much unlike the prologue just a few chapters before wherein the language is lyrical, high minded...full of theological and philosophical premise...language that verges on the mystical experience...In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God...but here in the first few lines of the fifth chapter....the language is strictly business...narrative action...much like the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke....here the author painting a quite extraordinary picture in just a few terse lines...a picture of a day in the life of Jesus....narrative action to be sure....and as the other segments in John that expound as to the nature of the Christ...I am vine...I am door...I am the good Shepard...I am word...God in me and I in God...this passage, though action, bears great theological and philosophical import as well....just coming at it in another way, another literary device.

So let's look at the scene, a scene of stark, yet marvelously colorful contrast. We look in on Jesus and his disciples going to a Jewish festival in Jerusalem...Now the Jews have all kinds of festivals...but the principal ones happened in Jerusalem...and they were lavish according to the historian Josephus...One would smell in the streets lamb cooking...I'm thinking with garlic, olive oil and rosemary...there would be bells ringing, drums and tambourines keeping rhythm....loud singing and raucous dancing...the place would be packed...no room in the streets or on rooftops...wine and beer flowing (yes they had something similar to beer)....the smell of spices and herbs in the air....the almost electric thrill of human community....like going to a big city for the first time....a lot like Jazz-fest, I imagine...Pearl Jam...the Allmand Brothers...and the Nevilles.

But in stark contrast to the ecstasy of festival in just a brief turn of view in these few lines...we come upon a sordid scene...we come to the Bethzatha pool, which was one of several hot bubbling mineral pools around Jerusalem...a pool thought to have healing qualities...The legend of the pool was that an angel would come and cause the waters to stir...and the first one to enter would be instantly healed....there are invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed, sick...the least... packed in here all over we are told...as crowded as the festival...filling all five niches surrounding the pool....the outcasts of this world, because illness renders one unclean in this culture....the hurt of the world there gathered...and then we are told that there is one at this

biblical healthcare facility who has been coming, waiting for thirty eight years to be healed...now we've all had to wait at a doctor's office, but this has got to be the Guinness record....this man for thirty eight years, healing just out of reach....and this facility is also under staffed...there is no one to help him into the pool...the system ain't working....and then Jesus who doesn't ask the man about his faith...the man probably had no idea who this Jesus was...Jesus does not ask for his papers, or an insurance card...Jesus now the proverbial angel roiling the waters...and the man stands up....a resurrection appearance here...the man enabled after thirty eight years to stand with new found dignity...this narrative will go on to tell us...but not in today's reading, that Jesus will bump into this man in the Temple, whole and well...the Temple a place he could not have gone had he been ill...lo, some thirty eight years....now whole and healed and at home, at festival....raised into new life, abundant new life that is new found community...This is a: the last shall come first story...that God loves us all, but the ones who cause God to get up in the morning...are the last and the least...the ones who suffer indignity...and indignity, God will not tolerate....Dignity is to stand welcomed and loved and whole.

Dear sisters and brothers, there is a question we must keep forever upon our lips: Who are *our* last...who are *our* lost...who are the ones who languish amid the indignities of our world...that is a question we Christian folk must ask....For far too long the church has offered answers only...I say we must ask the question....Do you want to be well?... Do you want to be whole?...Do you want to be welcome?...Do you wish to stand as equal? Who are these among us? Who are the unclean of our world? Who are the ones that forever have had to let others go before them?.... The poor black, the poor white...the landless native American...the homeless mother...the addict on the streets....the sick with no access to healthcare....the undocumented immigrant...It's a long list....getting longer....but these are the ones to which we are given....to whom Jesus is given.

Good people of God it is we now the raised Christ, we the ones who bear this festival life...It is for us to stir the waters of healing for our world that languishes for lack of simple human care, for lack of being claimed worthy....no one to put them in the pool....We heirs of the sacred lore....that God claims all for the joy of community....and it is our joy as well to find the lost, to find them walking freely in God's house...home again...and it has been such a long wait...but now in the raised Christ, in the light of the raised one...the wait is over....God has made all days Sabbath...all days holy...all days of healing....all festival....no more thirty eight years....no more waiting....only festival....only joy....and the time is now.