

Stretching Toward Sunday

Thoughts, readings and reflections
based on this week's lectionary readings

May 26, 2019
Sixth Sunday of Easter, Year C

The readings this week:

- Acts 16:9-15 ◦ Psalm 67
- Revelation 21:10, 22 - 22:5 ◦ John 14:23-29

[Click here to read this week's Scriptures](#)

Courage to be Whole

Jesus is in Jerusalem and he goes by the Pool of Bethesda. This pool, fed by an underground spring, is down, off of the street, and is surrounded by porticoes offering some shade and shelter. Legend said that on occasion an angel would trouble the waters of the pool and the first person into the water would be healed. Hence, the pool and the surrounding area had become the gathering place for anyone and everyone with some sort of sickness, but especially the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. All gathered watching the surface of the water for the smallest sign of the rippling of the waves. A small bubbling from the underground spring or even a slight breeze could cause a stampede of invalids trying to be the first into the water.

And Jesus asks this man lying over to one side, "Do you want to be made whole?"

"No thanks, I think I'll just stay here on my pallet and wait for the waters to ripple. I've been here 38 years and I know what to expect and I know all of the other people nearby. True, I'm probably not going to get better, but – you know – I've gotten used to being here, so thanks all the same, Jesus but I'll just lie here."

Do we fear the cure more than the illness? Bill Coffin said that if it is hell to be guilty, it's certainly scarier to be responsible – response-able – able to respond to God's call, able to respond to the word and love of Jesus. When we cease being a victim – "I can't get to the water Jesus; there's always someone else who gets there first" – and start being responsible then our legs are strong enough for us to walk beside others who are in pain and need help. Our arms are empowered to embrace our enemies and the outcasts. We no longer make excuses; instead we walk forward to new life in Jesus Christ and go to work serving, healing, hoping, and living a life of joy and fullness.

Charles Campbell, in his outstanding book, *The Word Before the Powers*, wonders that if one of the ways the Principalities and Powers, the Systems of Domination, keep us under their thumb is by keeping us busy, tired, and diverted. We become numbed to the call of Jesus Christ to serve God and serve the hurting because we

don't have time. We come home after work and collapse in front of the TV until it is time to go to bed and repeat the process all over again. Weekends are when we want to get out of town or do something else. So we live life to the minimum. And we say we want change when we actually want to remain the same – but we want to feel better about it.

We know that to get up and follow Jesus will involve us in people's lives in ways we're not sure we want, because to be whole means to be re-membered, re-connected with God and with God's people and God's creation. No more isolation. No more living my own private life where no one bothers me. To be whole means to get off of the couch and get involved. It means to work our tails off, often doing behind the scenes work that is tedious and overlooked. We know that to walk out of the door and say, "Here, am I Jesus! Send me!" is an invitation to maybe getting crucified like Jesus. As Dan Berrigan has said, "If you're going to follow Jesus, you had better look good on wood, because that is where you'll end up." We know all of that, so maybe our couches and our pallets don't look so bad.

No wonder so many churches are still on the pallet. No wonder so many of us are reticent about being made whole. And no wonder we have neither the courage nor the will nor the energy to say, "No!" to the many ways the Powers grind us all down. No wonder we are reluctant to say "Yes!" to Jesus Christ and the embodiment of his Abundant Life.

Well, in our story, this man has the guts to be whole. He takes a deep breath and nods to Jesus, "Yes, I want to be whole, healed and well. I know it will take time Jesus. I know it will take work and lots of unlearning old pain-filled habits accumulated over 38 years, and learning new habits. I know it is not going to be easy, but yes, Jesus, make me a whole person."

And Jesus does. No questions asked. No stipulations. No checking to see if he is truly deserving or not. Jesus just heals him. Grace. And the man picks up his mat and walks out of the door to new life. To wholeness.

~ Kyle Childress, [Ekklesia Project](#)





1st Reading: [Acts 16:9-15](#)

When did Paul experience the vision? What did he see? How did Paul and his companions interpret this vision? What did the missionaries do after they understood what God wanted them to do? When did Paul and his companions respond to God's instructions? How did the narrator of the story participate in Paul's travels? How did Luke describe Philippi? Where did Paul and his friends go to pray on the Sabbath? Whom did the travelers find at the place of prayer? Who was Lydia? How did Lydia respond to Paul's words? Who opened Lydia's heart? After Lydia became a believer, what did she and her household do? What did Lydia offer Paul and his group after her baptism? [Disciple Evangelism](#)

Psalm Reading: [Psalm 67](#)

What are the benefits of knowing God's salvation as a Christian? What then is it like for people not to know Jesus? What do God's people pray for? What's the purpose of the prayer? What is the constant prayer of the Psalm from v. 3-5? Why should the nations rejoice? The harvest comes in v.6, showing God has blessed His people. How do God's people react to God's blessing? While we know many blessings today in our lives, how do we God's ultimate grace and blessing to us today? How has God fulfilled Psalm 67 to us? What should our reaction to God's salvation of us be? How can you pray for God to be known in your life here as well as to the nations? How can you carry it out? [Mercy Church](#)



What do you mean you're going away? You just rose from the grave! We just got used to you popping in and out of rooms, sneaking up beside us on the road, cooking breakfast on the beach. Why would you leave us ... again? Where are you going? And why do you say we can't come with you?

The taste and touch of resurrection, new sight, new life, new everything pervades the senses of the disciples. And now, further loss is at hand? The old familiar state of longing intensifies in proximity to union with the Divine through Resurrection awareness.

Now, longing in everything, the sense of deep chasm short of fulfillment, and restiveness characterize the season of the soul at Ascensiontide.

We can't go back! "Wounded by love ... one cannot obtain that which one desires above all things, but must ever abide where one does not wish to be." (Ruysbroeck)

May Love increase your longing and desire for fulfillment this holy season. ~ [Suzanne Guthrie](#)

3rd Reading: [Revelation 21:10, 22 - 22:5](#)

How does John describe the heavenly city in Revelation? According to verse 22 and 23, what did the city not have? Why? Who will walk into the of the city? Who will bring glory and honor to the city? What will never be shut in the city? According to verse 27, what will never enter the city and who will enter the city? When the one that sat on the throne said, "It is done!" in 22:6, to what was he referring? What was John shown in verse 22:1? What was on the other side of the river? How many fruits did the tree of life bear? When did it bear them? What were it's leaves for? What will the servants of the lamb see? How long will the servants of the lamb reign?

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4th Reading: [John 14:23-29](#)

Jesus' first disciples developed their faith as they walked with him and personally heard his teachings. By what means has God helped you develop your own faith? Glancing back at the end of chapter 13, we see that Jesus has just told his disciples he will be leaving them, going somewhere they can't follow. For these men and women who had experienced God's presence so closely every day for three years, this was distressing news. In what ways does the disciple's anxiety come out in this passage? In what ways does Jesus begin addressing their fear? In what ways do Thomas and Phillip express their fear, and how does Jesus comfort them? How will the world know Jesus after this, and what role do his followers play? Why is it significant that the Spirit will "remind us" of the things Jesus taught? In what ways does Jesus display it times when he might be anxious, or when he is suffering? What does it mean for us to have that peace now? [Faith Element](#)

Praying Toward Sunday

God, mark us with grace and blessing!
Let our lives reflect your light and your goodness,
so that the way in which we live might bring others
to an awareness of your presence and your love.
Teach us to trust You with our whole heart,
and to praise You in every circumstance,
so that your grace and mercy might reach out through
us to the entire world. Amen.

~ [Re: Worship](#)