

Sermon for May 9th 2010 John 5 Final Version

On a special shelf in what we call the library of our home sits a very special gift. It is a small glass bottle with an emblem of Mary on the front of it. Our friend brought us this gift. He got it when he was in France. The bottle is filled with water – water that came from a special stream in Lourdes.

Lourdes is located in southwest France, near the foot of the Pyrenees Mountains. It is a small town but it draws huge crowds each year because of its most famous inhabitant, St. Bernadette, who in 1858, had a series of 18 visions of the Virgin Mary in a grotto. The apparition told her to drink from a nonexistent spring, which Bernadette uncovered by digging. The water in this spring is said to have miraculous healing properties. Bernadette's story was authenticated by the Catholic Church and she was later canonized.

Today people from all over the world go to Lourdes to drink or touch or be submerged into the healing water.

Lourdes brings to my mind a present day picture of the pool called Beth Zatha that we heard about in our gospel lesson today.

Archaeological digs begun in the 19th century have brought to light remains of the pool called Beth Zatha. Excavations in Jerusalem have disclosed a large trapezium shaped double pool divided in the middle by a broad wall.

This corresponds to a description given in the third century of a pool with four porticos surrounding it and a fifth in the middle. Remains of pillars and balustrades further support the identification and votive inscriptions suggest that ancient superstition ascribed healing virtue to the water.

Underneath the pool was a subterranean stream which every now and again bubbled up and disturbed the waters.

The belief was that the disturbance was caused by an angel, and that the first person to get into the pool after the troubling of the water would be healed of any illness from which he or she was suffering.

And it is here, at the pool called Beth Zatha, where we find Jesus in our gospel lesson this morning. With resolution Jesus threads his way through the mass of suffering to a very desperate man - a man who had been ill for thirty eight years – lying there on his mat- with no one to put him into the pool when the spring bubbled up.

Jesus comes to this crippled man on his mat and asks him this question: Do you want to get well?

Why would Jesus ask him this? The man would not have been lying by the side of this pool for 38 years if he did not want to get well?

Jesus knows the man wants to get well – he asks the question so that we can hear the man’s answer. The man does not answer with Yes, I want to get well. Instead he answers “sir I have no one to put me into the pool while the water is stirred up and while I am making my way someone else steps down ahead of me.”

This desperate answer exemplifies the man’s loss of hope. His loss of hope in people and his loss of hope in getting well, his loss of hope in God.

When Jesus asks the crippled man if he wants to get well –Jesus knows that the physical healing is not the only type of healing this man needs. Remember the story of the paralytic man who was lowered through the roof of a house on a pallet in order that he would be healed?

Jesus’ first words to the man were “son your sins are forgiven” and then Jesus said stand up, take up your mat and

go home. It was the same-- Jesus knew that man needed more than physical healing.

Just prior to the healing miracle of the man at Beth Zatha, Jesus had been at the well with the Samaritan woman. Jesus asked the Samaritan woman to give him a drink of water from the well. The woman could not believe that a Jewish man was talking to her, a Samaritan woman and she expresses this disbelief to him. Jesus answered her by telling her that the gift of God is living water and all who drink it will never thirst again. The woman asks Jesus for some of that water and he gives it to her saying this water will become a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.

That is the same living water Jesus gives to the man at the pool when he says, take up your mat and walk.

You don't need the water from that pool he says to the man – you need the living water that is in me. The water that restores hope and I am here to give you that.

This gospel reminds each one of us to take a good hard look at where we place our hope and where in our lives are we lacking hope? Many of us have lost hope at some point or another – we’ve lost hope in people who we love, we’ve lost hope in a job or in getting well, we’ve lost hope in expecting something good to happen and at times we have even lost hope in God.

But God proves in the gospel lessons and day after day in souls innumerable whose plight is desperate, who have lost hope, that when we turn to Jesus, the living water, our hope is restored and we are again able to stand up, take up our mats and walk.

This promise of healing that we have been given through Christ allows each of us to know that yes, on the weary feet of faith and the fragile wings of hope, God continues to love us, even in the wilderness, especially in the wilderness, because he has been in the wilderness with us. He

has been in the wilderness for us. He has been acquainted with our grief. And pick up our mats and walk we shall, every last one of us. Every one of us shall rise out of that wilderness just as out of the wilderness Christ rose before us. That is the promise Christ makes when he says you have been made well.

Indeed water is an important gift given to us by God and it is important in our own Christian faith. Water is the outward and visible sign of baptism. Today just before Edie is baptized Robert will say a prayer of thanksgiving over the water. It is a beautiful prayer that reminds us of the gift of water from the very beginning of creation.

But it is not the water that we look to for this healing hopeful restoration. It is Christ that we look to – Christ who through his birth, death and resurrection allows us to know of the never-ending joy of life everlasting. And with that comes hope.

Each time we have a baptism during the acclamation we say these words: there is one hope in God's call to us. Today through this sacrament of baptism Edie Gilger will become a member of this body of Christ and will be marked as Christ's own forever. That is the one hope in God's call to us – being marked as Christ's own for ever. It is that hope that Jesus restores to the crippled man at Beth Zatha, to the paralytic lowered down through the roof, to the Samaritan woman at the well and to every single person who is willing to accept this incredible gift that allows us to stand up, take up our mats, and be made well.