

John 5:1-9 (Sixth Sunday of Easter—Series C)
“Jesus Puts Us in the Water”
Lutheran Church of Our Redeemer, Enfield, CT
May 22, 2022

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Our text is the Gospel lesson recorded in John 5:

¹After these things there was a festival of the Jews and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. ²Now in Jerusalem there is near the Sheep Gate a pool with five covered porches, which in Hebrews is called Bethesda. ³Among these porches a large number of invalids were in the habit of lying—of the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. ⁵Now there was a certain man there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶When Jesus saw this man laying there and learned that he had already been there a long time, He said to him, “Do you want to become whole?” ⁷The invalid answered Him, “Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is troubled. While I am going, another goes down before me.” ⁸Jesus said to him, “Rise, take up your pallet, and walk.” ⁹And immediately the man became whole, and he took up his pallet and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath.

He waited and waited. This man who had been an invalid for 38 years waited with the others—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. They gathered at the pool under the covered porches, believing that the pool had healing powers. It was said that an angel would come and “trouble” the waters, stirring them up so that the first person to enter the moving waters would be healed of whatever disease they had. This man never made it in first. He had no person to put him into the pool when the water was disturbed. As a result, he was never able to make use of the supposed curative power of the water.

Now Jesus was in Jerusalem for a festival. St. John doesn’t mention which festival it was specifically. It might have been the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Pentecost, or the Feast of Tabernacles. Whichever it was, during festivals, the people of Israel remembered God’s works of redemption in the past and expressed Israel’s hope and prayer that God would continue to bless them with His presence and favor. So it is that God the Son had

come in human flesh in the person of Jesus to bring His grace to His people. Approaching the man, an invalid of 38-years, Jesus asked him, "Do you want to become whole?"

It's a question asking much more than "Do you want to be well and healthy again in your body?" In the context, Jesus' question inquires whether the man desires to be whole, pure, and without fault. It is this question that introduces Jesus into this story as the One who is the Creator, the Giver of Life. From John 1, "All things were made through him, and without him was not any thing made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men" (Jn. 1:3-4 ESV). Later in John 5, Jesus said to the Jews who were seeking all the more to kill Him, "For as the Father raises the dead and gives them life, so also the Son gives life to whom he will" (Jn. 5:21 ESV). To "be whole" is nothing other than to be "created anew." This is what Jesus had said to Nicodemus, "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again from above he cannot see the kingdom of God" (Jn. 3:3). In John's Gospel, to be made whole is to be created anew, born again from above, to become a disciple of Jesus.

Hence Jesus' question to the man, "Do you want to become whole?" Do you want to be made alive again, created anew from above? The man thinks only of the water in the pool and of his failure to be put into the water when it was "troubled." But Jesus was thinking new creation through the forgiveness of sins and the granting of new life to be lived as a follower of Jesus by faith. So Jesus said to him, "Rise, take up your pallet, and walk." To hear those words is to hear Jesus say, "Become whole." And the man "became whole, and he took up his pallet, and began to walk"! The effect of Jesus' command is immediate. The Creator spoke, and it was so, just as He had at the very beginning when He commanded, "Let there be light!" And there was light.

In John's rich theological themes in his gospel we are presented by this text of the healing of the invalid with a story of new creation through the forgiveness of sins. The man got up to walk, and his walking demonstrated that he had become whole. When Jesus found this man later on in the temple, He said to him, "See, you have become whole. Sin no longer, that nothing worse may happen to you"—like eternal death and hell (John 5:14).

But what does this have to do with us? Everything, actually. New Testament stories of Jesus' healings are narratives about the reversal of that original human fall into sin. Jesus' healings are connected with the forgiveness of sins as stories of new creation brought about by the removal of sin and its consequences and therefore by the restoration of people to "wholeness."

Do you suffer from lack of "wholeness"? Are you subject to the effects of and consequences of sin in your body and soul? Are you found to be lacking in spiritual things—blind, dead, and an enemy of God according to your fallen nature? If you sin, you are not whole, pure, and without fault. How did we learn it from Luther's *Small Catechism*? That I am "a lost and condemned creature" (Second Article). We have no way of healing or saving ourselves from this condition. There is no way that you or I can make ourselves whole, pure, and holy. We might say that we are like the man who cannot get into the pool. We have no strength in and of ourselves to change our standing before God. We cannot rely on the strength of others who are in the same sinful condition, who are just as lost and condemned as we are.

Then comes Jesus, true God and true Man. He and He alone "puts us into the water" and makes us whole in body, soul, and spirit. And the water that Christ puts us into is the

life-creating, sin-forgiving water of Holy Baptism. Like Jesus' healing of the paralyzed man with the power of His Word, Baptism is also an event of new creation. By water and the Spirit, you and I are "born again from above" through the washing of water combined with God's powerful Word for the forgiveness of sins. For Baptism is "the water included in God's command and connected with God's Word."¹ Luther explains further in the *Large Catechism*, "Baptism is quite a different thing from all other water. This is not because of its natural quality but because something more noble is added here. God Himself stakes His honor, His power, and His might on it. Therefore, Baptism is not only natural water, but a divine, heavenly, holy, and blessed water, and whatever other terms we can find to praise it. This is all because of the Word, which is a heavenly, holy Word, which no one can praise enough. For it has, and is able to do, all that God is and can do [Isaiah 55:10–11]. . . . We must think this way about Baptism and make it profitable for ourselves. So when our sins and conscience oppress us, we strengthen ourselves and take comfort and say, 'Nevertheless, I am baptized. And if I am baptized, it is promised to me that I shall be saved and have eternal life, both in soul and body.' For that is the reason why these two things are done in Baptism: the body—which can grasp nothing but the water—is sprinkled and, in addition, the Word is spoken for the soul to grasp. Now, since both, the water and the Word, make one Baptism, therefore, body and soul must be saved and live forever [1 Corinthians 15:53]. The soul lives through the Word, which it believes, but the body lives because it is united with the soul and also holds on through Baptism as it is able to grasp it. We have, therefore, no greater jewel in

¹ Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 339.

body and soul. For by Baptism we are made holy and are saved [1 Corinthians 6:11]. No other kind of life, no work upon earth, can do this."²

By Baptism, you have been made whole. Your sins are forgiven. You are rescued from death and the devil. You are given eternal salvation. These are the gifts Christ Jesus purchased and won for you with His death on the cross and resurrection from the dead. By means of water and His Word in Baptism, Jesus Christ delivered His gifts to each of you personally, making you pure, without fault—forgiven—healed of your sins unto life everlasting. Through Baptism, you have become new creations with the new life of faith in Jesus and the holy living that the Spirit produces as the fruits of faith in you. "Born again from above" in the lavish washing of Baptism, you have died to sin and now rise daily and walk as followers of Jesus. Romans 6, "What shall we say then? Are we to continue in sin that grace may abound? By no means! How can we who died to sin still live in it? Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? We were buried therefore with him by baptism into death, in order that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:1-4 ESV). So it is that Baptism "signifies that the old Adam in us should, by daily contrition and repentance, be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts. And also it shows that a new man should daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever."³

² Paul Timothy McCain, ed., *Concordia: The Lutheran Confessions* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2005), 424–425, 427.

³ *Ibid.*, 340.

By the washing of regeneration and renewal of the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Baptism, you have been given new life. You are made whole, a new creation in Christ Jesus. The Early Church Father, Gregory of Nazianzus, who lived in the late 300s A.D., said it this way:

Yesterday you were flung upon a bed, exhausted and paralyzed, and you had no one when the water should be troubled to put you into the pool. Today you have Him Who is in one Person . . . God and Man. You were raised up from your bed, . . . you took up your bed, and publicly acknowledged the benefit. Do not again be thrown upon your bed by sinning, in the evil rest of a body paralyzed by its pleasures. But as you now are, so walk, mindful of the command. Behold you are made whole. . . .⁴

Amen.

⁴ Gregory of Nazianzus, *Oration 40.33 (On Holy Baptism [NPNF² 7:372])*, quoted in William C. Weinrich, *John 1:1-7:1, Concordia Commentary* (St. Louis: Concordia, 2015), 568.