

In the Margins

Week 3: Jesus and the Physically At-Risk

John 5:1-10

As someone in the GenX generation, the idea of Jesus being a rebel makes me love him even more. I mean, yeah there's the whole God in flesh, died for my sin, raised back to life to give me life thing, but Jesus pushing against the political and religious systems of his day...I want to follow a guy like that! And actually, the first time I was introduced to this idea of Jesus being a rebel is in the text that we're looking at today. So, if you have a Bible, or a Bible app you like to use, turn with me to John 5.

Are you familiar with the term *compassion fatigue*? Compassion fatigue is this physical and mental exhaustion that leads to emotional withdrawal and it's often experienced by those who care for others. People who work in care professions like nurses, counselors, social workers, teachers, EMT's and law enforcement. Things like that. Compassion fatigue usually happens because of prolonged exposure to other people's trauma.

But, I think we're living in a time when *all of us* have had this prolonged exposure to other people's traumas. We're more aware of it than ever right in our own backyard, but in our globalized world, where we can find out about things in real time that are happening around the world, we have never been more aware of the pain and suffering that others are experiencing.

So, while most of us have our own stuff that we're dealing with. Things in our own life and family, we're also constantly inundated with the trauma and pain of others. And, it's good to know these things and stay up on them, but it can also be more than our souls were designed to bear. And I think, to a certain extent, many of us are experiencing a degree of compassion fatigue. Here are some of the symptoms. You see if any of them sound familiar.

People with compassion fatigue are often irritable and easily angered. They develop a sense of hopelessness; like nothing is ever going to change. They're anxious and overwhelmed. There's a simmering sense of guilt that they are not, or cannot, do more. Or guilt about the way they start seeing people and treating them. They become numb to the pain and suffering that others feel. Things that once broke their heart now make them feel frustrated. People suffering from compassion fatigue often find it easier to move away from the needs and pains of others because it all just feels like too much.

Have you been there? Are you there right now? One of the things that's always amazed me about Jesus is that he never seems to have experienced compassion fatigue. When Jesus encountered the pain of others, he moved towards them not away. He got tired and there were times he had to withdrawal from the crowds, but he never lost the ability to care for others. He never lost sight of God's image in them. What we see in the Gospels, these four accounts of Jesus' life and ministry, is that Jesus moved towards those in the margins and cared for their needs.

That's exactly what we see him do in our text today. Look at it with me. John 5, starting in verse 1...(READ Jn. 5:1-5)

Jesus and his disciples are in Jerusalem and they go to this spot known as Bethesda. Bethesda is a mashup of two Hebrew words, Bayith, which means House and Hesed with means God's loving kindness. And so this is the House of God's Loving Kindness.

And, in Bethesda, there was this large pool of water. And, it was really quite large. I got to visit it last Spring (show pictures). The pool was roughly the size of a football field and it was up to 20' deep in some places. It was surrounded by these large colonnades. You can see some of the columns in the pictures. This would have been a pretty large structure.

And, the people hanging out at the pool of Bethesda, the pool in the house of God's loving kindness, they weren't spending the day soaking in the sun and working on their tan. People hung around this pool because of the belief that its waters had some kind of healing properties in them. That's why John says in verse 3 that there was a great number of disabled people laying by the pool. People who were blind, or lame, or paralyzed.

This pool probably resembled many of the healing shrines that were popular in the ancient near east. They believed there was some kind of magic in the water, and that every time the waters stirred, that magic also stirred up and if you could get into the water, there was a chance that you might be healed of whatever is bothering you. There was a chance that God's loving kindness might meet you there.

So, friends or family would just bring people who were sick or couldn't walk or take care of themselves, they would bring them here and just kind of dump them off, and then go on about their day or their lives. And, verse 5 probably best describes how society viewed the people laying by the Pool of Bethesda. The NIV uses the word "invalid" and in my Bible, there's a column break, so the word is actually hyphenated to "in" hyphen, "valid." That's how the world saw the people that hung out by the pool in the house of God's loving kindness. There was a sense of compassion fatigue towards them. They were viewed as an in-valid part of society.

And, in the crowd of people laying on the patio by the pool, there was a man who had been an invalid for 38 years. Most people in his life had long since experienced compassion fatigue for him. They'd given up on him. After 38 years, this man had probably given up on himself. But then, Jesus moved towards him, and that changed everything. Let's watch what happens next...(play clip from The Chosen)

For 38 years, this man had been in pain. And, the physical pain was probably bad enough, but then there's the emotional pain that goes with it. The pain of cruelty and neglect. The pain of being looked past and stepped over. For 38 years, no one was willing to step into his pain. No one had compassion for him. It had all run out. But then Jesus moves towards him. Jesus sees him and cares.

And, I don't want to rush past this. We should be amazed that Jesus is even in this place. He's at Jerusalem, which was the hub of all religious activity. The temple is a *strong* stone's throw away from this pool. That's where all the, quote, "important" people were. Jesus had already hinted at being the Messiah, and so certainly he had a lot more important "God-stuff" to do than hanging out with a bunch of "in-valids" by a pool. And yet, that's exactly where we find him!

One commentary put it like this, "When Christ came to Jerusalem, he didn't visit the palaces, he visited the hospitals." I love that. Jesus visited the places where people were hurting, where people were desperate, where people were broken and in pain. Jesus moved towards the ones that everyone else moved from. He moved into the margins. Into those places of pain and suffering. And while we celebrate that today, not everyone did on that day. Look at verse 9...(READ 9b-10)

Do you think they missed the point here? In their interpretation of keeping the Sabbath holy, somewhere along the way, they decided that carrying anything on the Sabbath was considered work and something you weren't allowed to do. And, here's this guy that has been an invalid, disabled, for 38 years and now he's up and walking around and they're like, "Hey buddy, it's Sabbath. You're breaking the law by carrying the mat that you've been laying on for the past four decades."

And, this is where I think we see the rebellious side of Jesus...this man had been there for a long time. Jesus knew it was the Sabbath. He could have come back in the morning and found him again and avoided all of this controversy. But, I think he knew exactly what he was doing. He's revealing the lack of compassion these religious leaders have for others. They had turned the House of God's Loving Kindness into the place of their judgement and I imagine even those who were blind could see their hypocrisy.

And, the question I think the disciples were left with is the uncomfortable question I want us to wrestle with this morning...When you encounter the suffering of others, do you move towards them or away?

Do you move towards those who are in pain and suffering, or do you move away? Do you step in and do something, or do you stand at a distance casting judgement? Do you move into the margins, or do you stay safely on the sidelines?

If I'm honest, I often find myself moving away from those that Jesus moved towards. I can't imagine how many opportunities I've missed because I didn't have the compassion to move in the right direction. What we see in this account in John 5 is that there is something beautiful that happens when we move towards those in the margins the way Jesus moved towards us.

Which is why, as a church, we want to come alongside of at-risk people. Our vision at Sherwood Oaks is to unleash the Church with the love of Jesus to make an eternal difference in the lives of at-risk people.

One of the ways we define at-risk is those who are Physically At-Risk. We say that we will cross every socioeconomic divide to care for people and work for their good, believing each person has dignity and value in the Lord. And, there are so many ways we are already living out this vision.

Our global mission partners around the world are leading the way in physically caring for people by providing food and medical resources they need. One out of every ten dollars you give to Sherwood Oaks goes somewhere around the world to care for spiritually and physically at-risk people and it's adding up to make a huge difference in their lives and for the Kingdom.

Our Dollar Club Ministry is another way we are caring for the Physically At-Risk. Every \$1 bill that is given to Sherwood Oaks is pooled together to help an individual or family in need of a hand-up. Since we've been doing the Dollar Club over the last three years, we've been able to disperse well over \$100,000 to serve families across our communities who were in need.

We partner with community organizations like New Hope, who helps unhoused families get back on their feet. Wheeler Mission. Habitat for Humanity. And we do it with no strings attached, just a desire that through our love, people will find the hope of Jesus in their life and start following him.

In John 5, Jesus made that place the House of God's Loving Kindness, not because there was healing power in the waters, but because he stepped into the room. Jesus brought God's loving kindness with him wherever he went, and as a church, we want to do the same thing. We want to move towards those that Jesus moved towards and shine the light of his love wherever we go to serve.

And, if you're looking for ways to move towards people the way Jesus did, I encourage you to go to our website, socc.org/locally (Show screenshot/QR code). There, you will find some ways that you can serve right here in our own community. Download the monthly Serving Guide and see opportunities, individually, as a family, Connect Group.

If you struggle with this like I sometimes do, pray for the grace to see people the way God sees them. Challenge your assumptions by learning people's stories and move towards them the way Jesus moved towards you.

I'll close with this...While Jesus gives us a model to follow in John 5, I think he also gives us hope when we find ourselves marginalized, isolated, and alone. If you're here today and you're suffering in some way, please know that Jesus sees you, he knows your pain, and he loves you. He is still moving towards those who are hurting and he wants to move towards you. And, if there's anything we can do to come alongside of you, please give us the opportunity so you don't have to walk alone.