

Text: John 5: 1-18; John 23-29
Title: Jesus is not finished with us yet.
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When I was in college, one of our guilty pleasures was a TV preacher by the name of Dr. Gene Scott. He was decidedly different. He didn't even try for the syrupy sweet, southern accented run of the mill model- this guy was a loon! He seemed to be on 24 hours a day. He would wear all sorts of hats and sometimes 2 or 3 pairs of glasses at the same time while he ranted and raved over whatever it was that got him started that day. He would actually scold his watcher for not sending the cash. God's work is being thwarted because you have set in \$600! (no one seemed to wonder if the Creator of the Universe could be frustrated for the lack of \$600?) the classic was when, in a on screen tantrum, he fired his camera crews. Since there was no one manning the camera to follow him around, he would walk right off the shot- and this enraged him even more. I personally was amazed that anyone gave him a dime, for even then he represented to be the difference between ministry fueled by ego and ministry motivated by the Holy Spirit.

John 5 paints much the same picture. We are introduced to the pool of Beth-Zatha- literally the House of Grace. This was a place of healing; evidently something would occasionally bubble up from the spring. People felt that this was the result of angels moving the water and the story went that the first person there would get healed. We see this notion still- someone will see what they interpret as an image of Jesus or the Virgin Mary and the sick line up looking for a miracle. You can imagine the scene. All sorts of invalids, spending their day looking for a ripple, and when a bubble breaks the surface, there is a general sense of motion and everyone writhes, tries to stand, roll, anything to be the first into the pool. There is a reality show in here somewhere...

Jesus arrives on the scene and gets talking with a guy who has been on the losing end of this for 38 years! When Jesus asks him if he wants to be healed, this guy hears it almost as an accusation. Like there must be really something wrong with him if he has been at this for 38 years and that he hasn't been healed! So he answers Jesus out of a sense of his own human limitations- I've got no one to help me be the first one in! But that is not the question Jesus asked- no matter. As we've seen before Jesus

tells him to get up, put away his mat and walk- all this on the Sabbath! Jesus doesn't link the healing to forgiveness- it just that the Sabbath is a time of restoration and rest and what could be more restorative than walking for the first time in 38years?

But our healed guy catches flack from the religious authorities. You can almost hear John whisper, "Just how out of touch to you have to be to be torqued that someone has their life restored to them on the Sabbath? If someone is miraculously healed, wouldn't that meant that God wanted to do it today- and you have a problem with that?" Later on, Jesus catches up with the guy and declares that he is really healed and that he should avoid sin. The clear implication is that he was healed through no fault or merit of his own, that God simply chose to heal him because that is what God does. When the Jewish leadership catches up with Jesus, they connect the dots. They may say that they are upset over healing on the Sabbath- because that is work. Jesus connects the dots for them. God is about healing and restoration, that is God's work and God's work is never unlawful on the Sabbath. If Jesus is claiming to do the work of "My Father" than this is more than just a radical anthropomorphic image of God, Jesus is claiming to be God- and for that reason he has to go.

You know, the Jewish religious authorities were not always the bud guys. They looked back in their own history and noticed that when Israel obeyed God's covenant, then things went well for everybody. But when the people forgot the covenant, then bad things- the Assyrians, the Babylonians and the Romans- happened. so they sought to remind people of the covenant. Taking their inspiration from Leviticus 26:12, when God promised that He would be their God and they would be his people, they sought to make sure that the people's hearts were in the right place so that they may experience all of God's blessing. Not a bad idea- but as so often happens, good ideas devolve to random sets of rules as we try to make sure our hearts are in the right place without God's help. Instead of helping people experience God's blessing, they became a force to keep people in line; God had little to do with it all. I'm sure that Gene Scott didn't start out as a bad guy either.

So how do we make sure we don't make the same mistake? This is a subject that Jesus brings up at the Last Supper. He knows how easy it is to fall into upon our own devices. To make sure that doesn't happen Jesus promises the Holy Spirit. The

word that John uses for the Holy Spirit is the noun form of *parakaleo* – *paraclete*. It's one of those 44 magnum words that packs a whole lot of punch- it has a wide range of meaning from: encourage, strengthen, comfort and console, to call upon for help, to one who comforts and exhorts, the one who makes appeals on one's behalf. The translators chose The Advocate- and that works well enough, but it's like trying to take a sip from a fire hose, there is no way we are going to get the full meaning in one word.

What Jesus wants his disciples to understand is that their experience of being connected to each other, to being interdependent, to experiencing God's presence in their midst is linked to the Holy Spirit- and their experience of the Holy Spirit is linked to their choice to love one another. The presence of God is both foundational AND the experience of the church's love.

John's understanding of the Gospel is that God sent Jesus to earth to do His work. As part of that work, amid healing, casting out demons and forgiving sins, Jesus gathered and taught the disciples. Jesus then gives them the Holy Spirit and together with the Holy Spirit, the disciples continue God's work. Anyway you look at this, this is a bold undertaking, one that, if taken seriously, is going to produce some anxiety. Part of the Holy Spirit's ministry is to give us peace. God is indeed in charge, while we need to be faithful in what we are called to do, ultimately it is God who guarantees our success.

Bear in mind, all of this is playing out on the night that Jesus is betrayed. While the disciples don't know that yet, everyone who read the Gospel according to John already knows that. Those who read John's Gospel for the first time faced their own set of challenges, including persecution by the Romans. They needed the comfort, the encouragement and the advocacy of the Holy Spirit to carry on.

We do not face those particular challenges – ours are less clear cut. How do we pass the Gospel on to the next generation in this time of tumultuous change? To give you a sense of the scope of our challenge, let me share something from those who study technology and the rate of accumulation of knowledge. The estimated time it took for human knowledge to double between from the dawn of the industrial age 1750 – 1900 was about 150 years. In the 20th Century things speed up: from 1900- 1950, about 50 years. From 1950 to 1960- 10 years. Since 1960, the scope of human knowledge has doubled every 5 years! Given the Internet, expanded media and new technologies,

we estimate that by 2020 human knowledge will double every 73 days! One can bet that the strategies that worked in the past will no longer seem relevant. And yet....

We need the comfort, the encouragement and the advocacy of the Holy Spirit to carry on. What makes the church different than any other institution is the experience of the Body of Christ. We are individually forgiven and individually recreated step by step to be the men & women God means us to be- but all of this happens within the experience of the whole church. When we individually chose to put each other first, we become closer as a church family. Today we baptize little Elaney Rich. As those before us made promises to us on behalf of all the church, we make promises to her. In time, she will make those same promises. When we choose to love, our eyes are opened to the presence of the Holy Spirit and our hearts are opened to the experience of Jesus with us. This is not human doing, this is God's work.

Sure, there are going to be times when we do not live up to this ideal, but those times give opportunity to practice forgiveness and restoration- which was the ministry of Jesus in the first place. Together we will experience all the Jesus has for his people, bear witness to what we know- and let the Spirit do the rest. Let us pray.