

Thought for Sunday 6th September 2020

Pastor Gordon Hamilton

Read John 5:1-18

Jesus was not afraid of religious confrontation. As we have recognised over the last couple of weeks, Jesus was 100% human but also 100% divine, He was God incarnate. Jesus knew the creation that him and his father had created and he knew how to look after this creation and he tried to encourage those he came into contact with to do things His Father's and His way. John's gospel does not necessarily go along chronological lines, if you compare it with the other gospel writers, but that is not totally important to John, but the substance in the writing is important. Jesus was not unfamiliar with Jerusalem, even as a young man Mary and Joseph made annual trips to the city (see **Luke 2:41**). So Jesus goes to the area near Bethesda, house of mercy, and sees a man lying there. The man had been an invalid for 38 years. I'm not certain whether the number '38' is important or whether 'a long time' would have sufficed. We don't know why he was an invalid, whether through birth or an accident, but it appears that many people put their hope in the fact that if they could get into the water of the pool '*when the water is stirred*' they may be healed. We have no idea where this thought had come from, maybe someone had gone to wash in the pool some time before and had been healed from some ailment or other. We presume that someone would carry the man to the pool each day and leave him there, with no one waiting with him. When Jesus sees the man he asks the man; '*Do you want to get well?*' The man doesn't answer, yes, of course I want to get well. He just answers; '*I have no-one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.*' The man doesn't know who Jesus is and possibly has never heard about what Jesus had done for many other people. So the man doesn't ask Jesus for help to get into the water, he doesn't ask for alms and he doesn't ask for healing, yet Jesus just says to him; '*Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.*' And John tells us; '*at once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.*' We are not told there was any recognition of his healing, apart from the fact that he got up, walked and carried his mat. No thanks, no rejoicing, no giving thanks to God. You may remember when Peter and John healed the crippled man in Acts 3, there was a different scenario, **read verses 1-10**... Here in John 5 the man just appears to walk away, carrying his mat, and because it is the Sabbath the Jews, and we presume John means the Jewish leaders, said to him; '*It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat (on the Sabbath).*' It is at this point the man who was a cripple admitted that he had been healed by someone, or was this his way of passing the buck. '*the man who made me well told me to.*' When questioned about it, the man admits he didn't know who it was who had healed him. The sad part of this story is that the man who had been healed never gave God the glory, and we are not told that he became a follower of Jesus, or even tried to find out anymore about him. When we were in Dartmouth in July this year I got chatting to one of the council workers, he seemed quite nice and said his granddad had been a pastor or church minister so before we said our goodbyes I offered to pray for him, which he accepted. The following day when he was with his mates he totally ignored us. I pray that someone will give him another prod and open his eyes to the living Lord Jesus Christ, that is always my prayer, that people should have a personal relationship with Jesus. The verses 14

and 15 of our reading imply that no change had been made to the man's heart; *'Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, 'See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.'* The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.' I wonder where that man was on Palm Sunday or when Pilate asked what should he do with Jesus. Jesus knew the man's heart before he healed him but it didn't stop Jesus showing compassion to someone who was disabled in one way or another. There are times when we can struggle to understand why some people who don't recognise Jesus, who don't believe in God, appear to have the riches of this world, but all too often don't have the peace of God in their hearts. I remember reading a comment by Freddie Mercury, former lead singer with Queen, who said, even with all my wealth, I am still searching for peace and true happiness. That can only come through knowing Jesus as your Lord and Saviour. For Jesus this passage ends with the words that were to be his mark on this world; *'So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jews persecuted him. Jesus said to them, 'My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.'* For this reason the Jews tried all the harder to kill him; not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own Father, making himself equal with God.' I don't know whether Jews are allowed to carry their mats nowadays. I presume it would be like moving house or moving your possessions, but to me carry the mat you sit on appears a bit extreme. For the Jews the law, is the law, is the law. I believe in these days of the Covid19 coronavirus we have found some of the rules / laws that have been put into practise, some people have felt to be a bit over the top. I said on 16th August; Jesus didn't come to abolish the law, he came to live the law. The law lived in his heart, and rightly so because he was the author of the law because Jesus is God incarnate. So as Jesus spoke on murder, adultery, divorce, oaths and laws of the Sabbath, Jesus was giving his Father's definition of what the Law is about, not how the laws that human religious law makers have interpreted them. We are called to walk in the footsteps of Jesus so let us do it in Christian love. Amen.

Above all powers, above all kings
Above all nature and all created things
Above all wisdom and all the ways of man
You were here before the world began

Above all kingdoms, above all thrones
Above all wonders the world has ever known
Above all wealth and treasures of the earth
There's no way to measure what You're worth

Crucified, laid behind the stone
You lived to die, rejected and alone
Like a rose trampled on the ground
You took the fall and thought of me, above all.

Lenny LeBlanc