

The Rev. Giovan King+; Easter 6C; John 5.1-9; May 1, 2016; St. Christopher's Church

Okay, we're going to do a bit of Baptist role play this morning. You have in your pews some copies of the Gideon's Bible, donated to us by a member. It is the New King James Version of the Bible. Would you please turn to p. 1036 in that Bible? When you get there, may I hear an "Amen"?

And, who would like to read John 5, verse 7? ["The sick man answered Him, 'Sir, I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up but while I am coming, another steps down before me.'] Now, I have a question: why does it matter that someone steps down into the water before him? Can't he still make his way into the water? [Whoever gets into the water first, after it is stirred up, is healed.]

So, let's read together verse 4: "For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever steps in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had." Okay, now please find for me John 5, verse 4, in our bulletin today.

Guess what? It isn't there. If you look at a Revised Standard Version, New Revised Standard Version, New International Version, and Jerusalem Bible, you will see that none of them has this verse 4 in them. They go from verse 1, to 2, to 3, to 5, and so on.

By the way, there is a website, entitled something like: whotookJohn5:4outofmyBible.com. I remember the first time I really became aware of this omission. In our morning devotions, Tom described the phenomenon that the first one in the water was the one who is healed. I said, "What? ... That's not in MY Bible."

But, actually it WAS, and IS, in my Bible. It is in a footnote, with a remark that it seems not to be in the earliest versions of the Gospel. Also, scholars have noted that five of the words in the earliest versions of this Greek verse were not used anywhere else in the Book of John.

There does seem to have been a local superstition that crept into Jewish life, probably as a result of a bubbling spring somewhere that led into the pool, that the first into the water when it began to bubble was healed. Bubbling, moving, living water was a powerful symbol in Judaism. And, it would only be natural for a bubbling pool to gain a reputation for having unique restorative powers.

And, John seems to know of the superstition, because he makes reference to it in verse 7. But, he almost surely left the explanation out. Why? Perhaps to keep the focus on Jesus, the true healer. But, perhaps also because this "first one in the water is healed" message is somewhat counter to Jesus' message.

Think of the irony: the first one in the water was probably the one least likely to need healing. It was probably the one who'd be able to get in last that would need it the most. The guy in the story puts it clearly: "someone else always beats me into the water."

So, what to do with this "left-out" verse? Think about its message: survival of the fittest; hurry up or someone else will beat you to the punch; if you are not big and strong enough, you'll surely get squashed and left in the dust. Success will often be at the expense of someone else.

It's sort of like the great theologian, Lilly Tomlin, put it: "Just remember, we're all in this ... alone." But, Jesus, the greatest theologian and Lord, calls for us to measure success in a different way. Jesus calls for community. Jesus calls for helping, not trampling over, others. Jesus calls for helping other back on their feet, sometimes by empowering them just as he did with this man. He gave the man three imperatives: Stand. Take up your mat. Walk.

The "missing" verse from the Gospel passage this week is a footnote not to forget. It can be a footnote to jar you awake, to remember that whatever your spiritual "healing pool at

Bethsatha is,” whatever your goal in life is, as you are making your way there, look around to see who else might need real help getting to the goal. Someone might never make it to that metaphorical pool without your help. Look for ways to empower others in whatever way you can.

I saw a bumper sticker this week about the rapture. I’ve seen it before, but it actually fits into the sermon this week, in my opinion. It reads: “When the rapture comes, can I have your car?” I think that is another funny reminder, but a reminder nonetheless, that we are not all in this world to seek individually salvation, or bigger, or better toys. We are a community. We are the body of Christ, on earth. We are not, individually, Christ. But, together, we are his body, called to do the things he did, speak as he spoke, and to be his hands and feet in the world.

Remember when we were baptized, we not only were grafted into the family of God and into the body of Christ, we were grafted into the lives of one another. We vowed to respect the dignity of all. Chaz and Devon, along with the rest of us at this Saturday’s Cathedral service, will renew that vow. And, that vow compels us to be in loving relationship with everyone, with one another, with God, and with all of creation. That is what calls us to strive to alleviate any kind of suffering so prevalent at the pool by the Sheep Gate in today’s Gospel.

Finally, that should never be a burden to us. That is the privilege of our Baptism. Amen.