

The Rev. Anne Turner  
May 22, 2022 (Easter 6 C)  
John 5:1-9  
Grace Episcopal Church, Alexandria, Virginia

There is a fake Gospel here, and a real Gospel. I want you to hear the real Gospel.

The fake Gospel focuses on this verse: “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” The fake Gospel tells us that this man will be healed if he just wants it badly enough. The fake Gospel tells us that it is that man’s own fault if he wasn’t walking all along. The fake Gospel tells us that Jesus made that man aware of what he could do for himself all along.

All of that is not the gospel. All of that is a lie. It sounds like what is sometimes called the Protestant work ethic or the American capitalist ideal. It does not sound like Jesus.

Look at the gospel that’s truly here.

In that gospel, there is a man who is stuck. He is trying as hard as he can to get well. He sits by the place that might heal his illness. He sits there with such determination that he stays for year after year for almost four decades. Every time there might be a chance, he tries. And every time, forces beyond his control stop him from getting what he needs.

Maybe you haven’t been ill for 38 years, but I bet you know what it is like to be stuck. You work extra hours but still cannot pay the bills. You make all the best choices for your children and they still get into trouble. You try as hard as we can not to be anxious or depressed but the anxiety and depression stick. Forces beyond our control stop us from getting what we need.

And then Jesus shows up. Because that’s what Jesus does. Jesus seeks out not just those who are sick, but those who are stuck. In Luke’s gospel, Jesus says that he has come to set the prisoners free. I think prison is another name for when we get stuck.

Jesus not only shows up. Jesus offers a miracle. He doesn’t do the easy thing or the logical thing, which is to pick the sick man up and drop him in the pool. Instead, he shows off a little. He heals the man there on the spot.

This is not a pep talk. This is not enabling or empowering. This is pure grace.

Jesus offers you and me grace, too. Jesus is seeking us out, in all of those places where there is physical, emotional, mental, or spiritual pain that will not go away. And Jesus is offering us grace.

The invitation today to you and me today is to hear this true good news, and to welcome it. It is so easy to get trapped in our own pain—to get lost in frustration, or to drown in shame, or simply to give up. But Jesus asks us instead to listen for his voice.

There's a caution: we might be listening a long time. I hope not four decades. But I wonder what it was like for those other invalids, lying by the pool, who didn't get healed. Jesus doesn't fix everyone or everything at once.

But he does come to us. That is the promise of this miracle. And it is a promise that does not fade. We can wait in hope and listen with open ears. Because our God has good news for us, healing that rewards our waiting, the gift of grace that never fails.