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Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY
5/5/2013, The Sixth Sunday of Easter
John 5:1-9

In the name of the Father, and of the ✠ Son, and of the Holy Spirit, Amen.

Hello everyone. Some of you know me, but for those who don't, I'm Bobby Franzese. I'm 15 years old, and have been coming to this Church all my life. Two years ago, I was confirmed here. Today, I have the privilege of giving a sermon.

The gospel reading from today focuses in on one of the key aspects of Jesus which we see again and again in the Bible; he seeks out the lowest members of society, the blind, the crippled, the sinners. He is quoted in the book of Luke, chapter 5, as saying "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." Jesus is the greatest of the great. He could choose to be anywhere in Jerusalem, with people who would no doubt give him riches and power. But no. He chooses to be among those who society casts out, the people who they ignore. Look where they are! Near a gate to the city where they bring in sheep, away from people who do not want to see them. Yet, Jesus wants to be there, wants to see them.

And he has a good reason for wanting to come there. Here is a man who has been ill for 38 years. 38 YEARS. I would like to try and explain how long that is, and what it feels like, but I can't. I'm 15 years old. 38 years ago was 1975, when Ford was President, and gas cost 57 cents a gallon. For all of this time, this man has been sick. He has tried time and time again to step into this pool of water, which has healing powers when it is stirred up, but has been unsuccessful. I, myself, got a taste of what it is like to have a sickness like this. I was injured during Football season, which prevented me from playing football or wrestling, two sports I really enjoy. And that was only for a couple months, and I was still able to do everything else; walk, go to school. Yet, I struggled with being injured. But this man has been sick and unable to do anything. I can hardly imagine what kind of pain that gives a person.

And now Jesus comes along and he asks him, "Do you want to be healed?" After all of this time, this man still has the desire to be whole once again. Once he answers that yes, he has tried to be healed, Jesus simply tells him to stand up and walk, and he will be healed. Now, this is somewhat of a test. If the man did not want to be healed, he would not stand up. But because he truly does, he follows the instructions of Jesus. Because he was willing to take the literal and metaphorical first step towards getting better, Jesus was willing to do the rest and make him well.

This is true in all respects. If we are willing to help ourselves towards Jesus and goodness, he will help us. The same Jesus who helped this man is still with us today, and still wishes to help us. If we can take that first step towards recovery, he will give us aid.

If you take the “illness” from this passage and replace it with “sin,” we get at another essential part of the help Jesus gives to us. After a life of living in sin, it can start to feel like part of one’s identity. That makes the question, “Do you want to be healed,” even harder to answer. Our identities, even the negative parts, can be extraordinarily difficult to leave behind us. Yet here, Jesus shows us that if we can but take that first step towards redemption, the rest of the path will be under his guidance. Jesus placed a solid step before this man, “Rise and walk.” He places another solid step before all of us who are sick with sin, to return back to the commandments, to love God, and to love our neighbors. Just like he told the sick man to stand up and be healed from illness, he tells us to stand up and be healed from sin.

In the end, none of us are quite as healthy or strong as we should be. We all stand in need of the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, our Lord, to whom belongs the glory, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now and forever, Amen.