

*Expect the Unexpected*  
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Romans 8:18-25, John 5:1-9

Last weekend, as many do, my extended family celebrated Independence Day around the grill. Barbecue ribs, chicken, beef, pork... everything was cooked on the grill. And as we gathered together, our conversations led us to reflect on how different this year has been. And what I found, within my family, was that it's hard NOT to keep our thoughts of social distancing, mandatory masks, and racial injustice from our discussions. In fact, it was helpful for us to share our discomforts, our disagreements, and our agreements to what's been happening around us. Each of us taking turns talking about how our lives have been altered. The virus forcing some to stay at home, others finally comfortable with online shopping, while others prefer to put on the corona-spacesuit and venture outside to shop. But all of us at some point, when referring to an event or a change in our daily routine, would say, "I never expected that."

The Unexpected change in daily life and the Unexpected, further extended, with the tragic death of George Floyd on May 25, sparking protests across the country and igniting a RACIAL RECKONING within all our communities. Protests against racism... Protests against Police Brutality... across America, and around the world. Moving many who had flippantly refused to even acknowledge words that ended in -isms to re-evaluate that all words matter, especially, to those who bear their social and economic scars.

Our own Archbishop Foley Beach calls our attention to this during his opening address to the Provincial Council nearly three weeks ago. He said, "What the Lord has shown me... about me... in the past few weeks... is this: I have failed to understand the incredible burden and pain that many of my black brothers and sisters live with every day. I have not wept with those who weep. And I have not understood the depth of the effect of racism and injustice." Foley continues, "I have not understood the burden of living under racist acts, slurs, and the systems they endure every day, nor have I understood the fear with which they constantly live for themselves and their families. It is not enough, not to be a racist; we must not be blind to the sin of racism and we must not ignore it within our midst.

Did you know that the same day our Archbishop made those comments, was the same day City Council voted to remove the John C. Calhoun statue from its 115-foot high-perch over Marion Square where it has been for nearly 124 years? The physical removing of the statue, on the following day, took more than 17 hours longer than expected, its design of granite, concrete, epoxy and metal testing the cutting saw. Our Mayor John Tecklenburg said of the unexpected difficulty, "Like racism, he was deeply rooted in there."

My friends, six months ago, none of us could have imagined how our world – and how our lives – would be today. All of this unexpected, but as Christians we understand God's power to take things, to take all things, and use them in a collective way to bring us healing. As Paul says in our Romans reading, "And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to His purpose." And in Jesus, in His compassion, we'll come to find in faith that we can expect the unexpected.

Jesus Healing in unexpected ways just like He did with the Man at Bethesda. A man who had a prolonged disability and a profound sense of hopelessness. From our first verse in John, Chapter 5, we know that Jesus is now back in Jerusalem. He visits a pool where sick and suffering people gathered to seek healing. The water is occasionally disturbed, as we read in verse 7, "stirred up." Perhaps from an underground source such as a spring. And the people believe that you could be healed by this disturbance. And it's implied that at least some of those who got into the pool when it was stirred were healed. At the pool is a man unable to walk, and no one is there to help him. Every time the water stirs, he has no hope of getting in there before someone else cuts in front of him.

And within this man's utter hopelessness and futility, Jesus takes the initiative. Jesus approaches the man and asked this question, "Do you want to be healed?" And the man's response reveals that he's not only filled with despair, but that his only focus for healing was the pool. In his mind there's no other way, and he can't get there in time. Day after day, week after week,

he sees other people beat him to it. On top of that, he has no one; he doesn't have one friend willing to wait by his side to help him into the pool. He's suffering, without hope, and he's alone.

Have you ever felt that way? Have you ever been so focused on only one outcome? That there's only one way for God to make this right? Even your prayers are so worded to tightly bound the solution you expect from God. So set we often become in the expected outcome that when we don't get our way, we become bitter and enraged. And if that happens, then we become blinded to what God may be doing in our lives, finding ourselves drifting away from others and from God. And yet, Jesus is always there, knocking at our door waiting for us to respond to Him, just like he does in this account with the man at Bethesda.

It is all part of the gospel message. The Gospel stressing both divine sovereignty and our human responsibility. What would you say to Jesus if He asked you, "Do you want to be healed?" Jesus asking, "Do you want to be rid of your addictions and other sins? Do you want an end to your anger?" Do you want to let go of that time in your life that you replay over-and-over again in your head? The one that keeps you up at night.

Jesus asked the man, "Do you want to be healed?" and in verse 7, *The sick man answered Jesus, "Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going, another steps down before me."* The man's answer implies that he wants to be healed, and he telling Jesus how his healing can take place. All he needs is someone to help him into the pool at the right time. He's right, Jesus wants to help him. But he's off the mark on how Jesus will heal him. This man has an expectation on how to be heal, but he has no idea who Jesus is.

With Jesus, we can expect the unexpected. The man at the pool gets far more than what he expected. Instead of giving him a hand into the pool, Jesus gives him immediate and complete healing. In verse 8, *Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk."* <sup>9</sup> *And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked.* Jesus healed the man not by taking him down into the pool of **supposed powers**, but by commanding him to get up and walk. There is power in the word of the Son of God, and when Jesus speaks, diseased and disabled bodies obey. Immediately the man obeyed Jesus' command.

And I want us to understand what is going on here. See the man didn't get grace because he obeyed. Rather, he was given grace first, and then was given the ability to obey in faith. It's the same for us today. Jesus grants a gracious healing to us as well, healing us from sin and its consequences. It's God's grace... a gift waiting to be accepted. But if you believe that if only the events in your life that are causing your affliction would end, that if only God could change the world in the way you think it should be, then you're missing the point.

The man at Bethesda was given immediate healing in a way he did not expect, and he then obeyed Jesus to Get Up, and latter, most importantly, Jesus tells him to sin no more. You see, a broken body may be healed immediately or in time, just as our situations may change in our favor. But it's the spiritual healing, the removal of the guilt and shame, OF SIN, and release from the burdens of this earthly life that is the ultimate healing. God's involvement for our spiritual healing is what Jesus brings. He's looking to save us for eternity.

This is the saving grace that God extends to all of us. He does this not because of anything we have done and certainly not because we deserve it. When something in our lives doesn't go well, we turn and trust in God. That He has a plan of glory and He works in unexpected ways to bring about a greater good than we could ever imagine. Paul understood this when he tells us in 1 Thessalonians, chapter 5 to Rejoice and pray always, giving thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. As Max Lucado says, "Faith is not the belief that God will do what you want. It is the belief that God will do what is right."

You see, what Jesus is looking for IN US is faith in *Him*. And all we have to do is to respond to Him. And when we respond to Jesus and accept Him, the grace of God that comes through Jesus gives us the ability to obey His commands. As our hearts are transformed more and more into the likeness of Christ, we'll begin to see the world differently. And we'll begin to see God's work woven throughout the fabric of our lives. Just this past week, our brother Bill Biggie reminded our Midday Prayer life group that all you have to do is to look back over your life and you'll see God's hand at work. A testament of seeing life through the lens of Jesus.

One of my favorite C.S. Lewis quotes is this: "I believe in Christianity as I believe that the sun (the S U N) has risen not only because I see it, but because by its light, I see everything else." And the brighter the light of Christ within us, the more we are moved to follow His ways to see His Glory and to bring Him Glory.

**This brings us to our teaching point this morning:**

Our Obedience to God's commands brings us to expect the power of God in unexpected ways. Expecting the power of God in unexpected ways is all part of our Christian walk. A walk of perseverance, endurance and resilience. It leads us to say that no matter what I want, Lord, may Your will be done. This is our God-honoring obedience and it's only possible because of what Christ did in His death and resurrection for us. This is why Jesus said, in John, Chapter 15, "You can do nothing without me."

As believers in Christ, we have been granted spiritual healing for the ultimate purpose, that we might **walk in holiness**, no longer enslaved to sin. And we're reminded in 2 Corinthians that God's grace is sufficient for our struggles, His power is perfected in our weakness. Jesus is the ultimate healer; and our only solution to our hopelessness and despair. With Jesus, and in Jesus, is our only way to walk in His ways through our discomforts. Six months ago, none of us could have imagined how our world – and how our lives – would be today. Let today be the day to trust in God's power to take all things, and for God to use them in a collective way to bring healing. Jesus is asking you, "Do you want to be healed?" If your answer is yes, then Get up and Walk in His Holiness and expect the power of God in unexpected ways.

Let us pray. Father, without Your healing grace we have no hope, for no one can come to You without Jesus. Thank You for sending Your Holy Spirit to transform our hearts and to open our eyes to your greater work within the world and our lives. Strengthen us to Get up and to walk in Holiness Expecting Your Power in Unexpected Ways. Amen.