

St. Andrew's Presbyterian Church, Perth
Sunday, March 16th, 2025
Rev. Gerry Gallant

God Helps Those Who Cannot Help Themselves
Second Sunday of Lent
John 5:1-9

Welcome

Announcements

Call to Worship

The Lord is our light and our salvation:
Of whom shall we be afraid?

The Lord is the stronghold of our life:
We will wait for the Lord in faithfulness.

Let us seek the Lord's face in this time of worship:
We will honour God's presence in our prayers and our praises!

Prayer of Adoration and Invocation

God ever creating, ever loving, ever leading:
when things around us feel chaotic, you are peace.
When so much we hear is not reliable, your word is truth.
When we are paralyzed by fear and anxiety, your presence is freedom.
When we feel bereft and helpless, your love gives us hope.
God, you are the Source of all that matters.
We bring you our prayers and our praise this day,
for you reveal yourself to us in the goodness of creation,
in the love and mercy of Christ, your beloved,
and through the energy and wisdom of the Holy Spirit.
We worship you, O God,
ever Three and ever One, world without end. **Amen.**

Children's Video

Call to Confession

Prayer of Confession

God of compassion,
We are creatures who seek our own comfort.

We confess that we prefer our own plans to your purposes.
We shrink from costly discipleship and put our own interests first.
Forgive our fleeting commitment
and the times we have indulged our own complaints.
Have mercy on us.
Inspire us with the energy to do your will
and serve our neighbours in the example of Christ, your Son, and our Lord.
Amen.

Assurance of Pardon

Friends in Christ, while it is true that we have all sinned,
 it is a greater truth that we are forgiven through God's love poured out in Jesus
 Christ.
 To all who humbly seek the mercy of God I say, in Jesus Christ our sin is forgiven
 Be at peace with God, with yourself, and with one another.

The Lord's Prayer

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name
Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven
Give us this day our daily bread
And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors
And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from the evil one
For Thine is the kingdom, the power and the glory,
Forever and ever, Amen.

Hymn: "There is a Redeemer"

There is a Redeemer,
 Jesus God's own Son,
 Precious Lamb of God,
 Messiah, Holy One.

Chorus

Thank You, O my Father
 For giving us Your Son,
 And leaving Your Spirit 'til
 Your work on earth is done.

Jesus my Redeemer,
 Name above all names,
 Precious Lamb of God,
 Messiah, O for sinners slain. (Chorus)

When I stand in glory
I will see His face,
And there I'll serve
My King forever,
In that holy place. (Chorus)

Responsive Reading

Psalm 27

The Lord is my light and my salvation;
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the stronghold of my life;
of whom shall I be afraid?

**²When evildoers assail me
to eat up my flesh,
my adversaries and foes,
it is they who stumble and fall.**

³Though an army encamp against me,
my heart shall not fear;
though war arise against me,
yet I will be confident.

**⁴One thing have I asked of the Lord,
that will I seek after:
that I may dwell in the house of the Lord
all the days of my life,
to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord
and to inquire in his temple.**

⁵For he will hide me in his shelter
in the day of trouble;
he will conceal me under the cover of his tent;
he will lift me high upon a rock.

**⁶And now my head shall be lifted up
above my enemies all around me,
and I will offer in his tent
sacrifices with shouts of joy;
I will sing and make melody to the Lord.**

⁷Hear, O Lord, when I cry aloud;

be gracious to me and answer me!

⁸You have said, "Seek my face."

My heart says to you,

"Your face, Lord, do I seek."

⁹**Hide not your face from me.**

Turn not your servant away in anger,

O you who have been my help.

Cast me not off; forsake me not,

O God of my salvation!

¹⁰**For my father and my mother have forsaken me,**

but the Lord will take me in.

¹¹Teach me your way, O Lord,

and lead me on a level path

because of my enemies.

¹²Give me not up to the will of my adversaries;

for false witnesses have risen against me,

and they breathe out violence.

¹³**I believe that I shall look upon the goodness of the Lord**

in the land of the living!

¹⁴**Wait for the Lord;**

be strong, and let your heart take courage;

wait for the Lord!

Prayer for Illumination

Scripture

John 5:1-9

5 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called

Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a multitude of

invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵ One man was there who had been an

invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be healed?"

⁷ The sick man answered him, "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."

⁸ Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up your bed, and walk." ⁹ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

Sermon

You might be familiar with the expression, 'God helps those who cannot help themselves.'

Many people will tell you that this expression comes from the Bible, and I can confirm that it does not.

In fact, it comes from an old Greek expression often used by the Greek philosophers more than 500 years before the birth of Christ.

The truth is actually quite the opposite, God helps those that cannot help themselves!

God helps those who recognize and acknowledge their inability to help themselves, to save themselves, and turn away from self and turn to God seeking help and salvation.

Remember what I said last week, I have never seen someone say I won the lottery and became a Christian. Instead, it is the person who is suffering, persecuted, addicted. It is the person who knows that there is nothing in themselves or in this world that can change them, that turns to God and has God change them through the Holy Spirit.

God gives help to the helpless and hope to the hopeless.

That is what Jesus is doing here in chapter five of the book of John. This is the third sign of the seven signs that we are going to find in the book of John. We have seen the changing of water into wine, the healing of the official's son and now the healing of the man at the pool. These signs are important, because each of them paints for us a very clear picture of how God saves sinners.

Each healing that Jesus performs in the Gospels points to the salvation of sinners. The water being turned into wines shows how we are saved by God's Word, convicting us and changing us. The healing of the official's son that we looked at last week showed how we are saved by placing our absolute faith in God, trusting in him completely, committing ourselves to him and giving up our own focus on self.

Today, we will see the man at the pool healed by Jesus as an example of how God saves sinners through his grace.

The path to salvation, the way to be saved, includes the Word of God, The spirit of God, the faith of God and the grace of God.

Which we see in Ephesians:

Ephesians 2:8-9

⁸ For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God, ⁹ not a result of works, so that no one may boast.

The first five verses of chapter 5 give us the setting for this third sign in the book of John.

John 5:1-5

5 After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

² Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. ³ In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. ⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

So, this takes place after the healing of the official's son in the region of Galilee, and once again Jesus is moving from the region in the north back into Jerusalem. Another interesting point is that with this trip south, we are actually entering the second year of Jesus's public ministry on earth.

This is important because the first two signs we read about, were both performed in a more private setting than this third sign. At the pool of Bethesda when Jesus heals this man it is in a very public setting, and it will bring Him into conflict with the Jewish leaders and authorities of His day.

The Scripture starts by telling us that Jesus went to Jerusalem at the time of a feast of the Jews. The most common question is which feast John? And this is a topic of discussion often over many pages in most commentaries, however, at the end of pages upon pages of discussion the conclusion is always the same, we do not know which feast.

There were three mandatory feasts for the Jews to attend in Jerusalem, so it was likely one of them: Passover, Pentecost, or Tabernacles. We do not know which feast it was, we just know that he was there for this feast.

It was here in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate, which also had a large market nearby, at a pool called Bethesda that this sign will take place. The pool had five colonnades, or porches or patios, basically five areas where people could sit near the pool and be shaded from the sun.

Bethesda can be translated as, 'House of Mercy.' Beth means house so Bethlehem is house of bread, Bethany is house of figs.

So here in a place called the 'House of Mercy', our Lord Jesus Christ will come and through his grace heal a man who is desperately in need of saving.

As you can imagine, in an area where miraculous healing takes place, there was a multitude of people wanting to be healed gathered. People with all kinds of illnesses and

issues would gather here in the house of mercy: the invalid, the blind, the lame and the paralyzed, seeking healing in the waters of the pool.

If you're paying attention, you might notice that the Scripture we just read is off. Counts the verses, 1,2,3,5. I am no math teacher, but something seems off in that number sequence. This is because in the earliest transcripts what is verse 4 in the vulgate, or the Roman Catholic Bible, is a foot note meant to help the reader understand why so many people were gathered here at Bethesda, so many modern Christian Bibles have returned verse 4 to its footnote status.

Verse 4 reads:

John 5:4

waiting for the moving of the water; ⁴for an angel of the Lord went down at certain seasons into the pool, and stirred the water: whoever stepped in first after the stirring of the water was healed of whatever disease he had

Having this verse helps us understand why so many were gathered at this pool waiting for their opportunity to be healed, it also will help us understand verse 7 when the man refers to the waters being stirred up.

Of all the people who are gathered in the colonnades we are then shown this one man, who had been invalid for 38 years, waiting to get into the pool and be healed, this is our setting.

Remember that this is a literal story, this really happened, this place is real, and you can visit it today. There really were multitudes of sick people, filled with hopelessness from their illnesses and infirmities gathered here at this pool wishing that they could be healed.

However, there is also something spiritual here in this setting, there is a multitude of sinful, hopeless and helpless people in the world. It is a reminder for us that none of us is capable of living a 'good life' because of our sinful nature, lame, paralyzed or blind to the sin in our lives, we are spiritually sick, until Jesus heals us, and the Holy Spirit opens our eyes and begins to change us

This makes it clear, without God man cannot save himself.

You cannot save yourself. Being a good person does not save you, donating to charities does not save you, serving in the church does not save you, no right or ritual saves you, just being baptized does not save you. Only Jesus can save you.

Truthfully, we are all blind to the sin in our lives until the Holy Spirit opens our eyes.

Do you remember what Jesus told Nicodemus just a few weeks ago?

John 3:3

³Jesus answered him, “Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.”

We are spiritually lame, spiritually blind, we are unable to see our sin or the kingdom of heaven.

2 Corinthians 4:4

⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

Satan blinds the eyes and minds of unbelievers, he wants no way for them to see the light, he wants to keep mankind spiritually invalid, spiritually blind, unable to do anything to save themselves, bound instead to their sin.

If you have ever had someone look at you like you are crazy for obeying the Word of God, it is because they are blind to its truth. They do not see the same things that the saved see.

This means that even if you try to live the Christian life, it will not work, unless you are saved. This is a message that not many will want to hear, but it is a truth of the Scripture.

You cannot live a Christ like life, without Christ. You need God to heal your infirmities so you can walk in his ways, you need God to heal your blindness so that you can see his truths, and you need him to give you the strength to live in obedience to him.

Paul wrote about this in his letter to the Romans, how you may want to do good, may want to live a Christ like life, but without submission to God it is not possible because of our sinful nature.

Romans 7:14-20

¹⁴For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am of the flesh, sold under sin. ¹⁵For I do not understand my own actions. For I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate. ¹⁶Now if I do what I do not want, I agree with the law, that it is good. ¹⁷So now it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me. ¹⁸For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh. For I have the desire to do what is right, but not the ability to carry it out. ¹⁹For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing. ²⁰Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells within me.

This is the picture being painted for us at the well, sinful people, in need of salvation. A people who are blind to the truth of God's Word, unable to walk in his way, filled with helplessness and hopeless for all of eternity.

And among them is this man who had been sick for 38 years, and likely coming to the pool for quite some time, hoping to be healed, but every time the water stirred someone else made it into the waters before him, his situation was hopeless. He cannot save himself.

This is an important message for the world today. You cannot save yourself, being religious cannot save you, being obedient to the laws of man cannot save you, being good by the standards of society cannot save you.

Once again, we have this sign, this salvation being offered one on one, Jesus and this one man out of the multitudes that are gathered at the pool.

There is an important picture being painted here to help us understand our salvation. We often place our faith in worldly things, we place our hope in the things of this world, things which cannot offer us salvation. We are invalid, blind, unable to walk in or even see and understand God's ways. We cannot save ourselves, until God comes to us.

Did you notice that the man does not call out to Jesus? He does not ask for healing.

In the sign of the water being turn into wine he was asked to do so by his mother, in the healing of the official's son it was because the official went to him. However, in this case we have something different happening. A man who has no idea who Jesus is, a man who is just sitting there waiting to be healed and has no idea who the person who heals him actually is.

This is how many people come to faith. They have no idea who God is, God comes to them in a time of trouble, tribulation, or turmoil, and makes himself known to them. Then they begin to pursue him.

If you are earnestly trying to figure out who God is in your life, it is because God came to you first and opened your eyes to Him.

If you are earnestly seeking God, his grace will draw you to him, and you will find yourself being changed from the person you were into the person you are called to be.

This sign at the pool of Bethesda shows how God in his infinite mercy and grace saves those who know nothing of him. God uses people and saves people according to his will.

Paul explains this in Romans:

Romans 9:14-18

¹⁴What shall we say then? Is there injustice on God's part? By no means! ¹⁵For he says to Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I have compassion." ¹⁶So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy. ¹⁷For the Scripture says to Pharaoh,

“For this very purpose I have raised you up, that I might show my power in you, and that my name might be proclaimed in all the earth.” ¹⁸ So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.

God saves who God saves for his purpose. God saved you and I for his purposes. Not because we are special, not because we have some hidden ability or talent, but because in his infinite mercy and grace he found a purpose for us.

In fact, in his letter to the Corinthians it is clear that we are chosen by God for his purposes.

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

²⁶ For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. ³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption, ³¹ so that, as it is written, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.”

So, if God has chosen you, you are a fool, that God has chosen to use for his purposes in this fallen world.

God saves us, we do not save ourselves.

John 5:5-7

⁵ One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. ⁶ When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, “Do you want to be healed?”

When Jesus saw the man at the pool, he knew him and spoke to him.

The same way God saw you, he knew you and he spoke to you.

Jesus starts with a question, ‘Do you want to be healed?’

That’s seems like a silly question, this man has been invalid for 38 years. Our minds all respond, ‘Absolutely, of course he wants to be healed!’ Right?

But does he? There are many people in this world who have physical, mental, social or emotional issues who do not want to be healed. There are many people who do not want to be healed because to be healed would mean that they have to change the way that they live, and they are comfortable in the way that they are living.

Even when we look at this question spiritually, we see the same thing. There are a lot of people who do not want Jesus Christ in their lives, they do not want to be reborn because to be reborn, to be brought back to spiritual life, to have their infirmities healed and their eyes opened means that they would have to change the way that they live, and they are comfortable in their lives.

When God comes to people and asks them, do you want to be made whole? They do not see their need for salvation, they enjoy their life and do not see a need for God. There are others who love their sin more than they love God.

Remember what we read earlier:

2 Corinthians 4:4

⁴In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.

I lived a sinful life, I once thought I did not need God, I once thought my sin was not really a sin. It was not until I gave my heart fully to God that he removed my blindness and opened up my own eyes to my sin. I used to think that being a Christian meant giving up all the pleasures of this world, it meant a boring and lackluster life. So, I lived a life, where I was trying to be happy, trying to be fulfilled, but it was not, it was troubled, and it was not until I gave my life to God that I was happy and fulfilled.

There are a lot of people who do not want to have their life changed by coming to God fully, so they become religious, going to church, doing religious things, while not fully committing to God and never really being changed by the Holy Spirit at work in them.

Many people will say, I will come to God later, when I am less busy, or older, or when I have run the course of my sinful life.

So, Jesus asking this question to the man is an important question.

Do you want to be healed? God is asking you that question today: Do you want to be healed, to be made whole, to be reborn? Do you? Are you willing to be converted, changed and committed to the Lord?

Jesus goes to the man and asks him if he wants to be healed?

God goes to you, he asks you if you want to be healed? And you, with your free will, can choose how to answer that question.

God chooses you and you respond to that choosing. When Jesus comes to you and asks you if you want to be made whole, when he asks if you would like to be healed, when he asks if you want to be reborn?

If you say yes and commit yourself to the Lord you will not come under condemnation, you will be granted Eternal life and you will begin the process of being changed by the Holy Spirit.

So, God saves.

Salvation belongs to God alone, but you need to believe, you need to commit, you need to repent, and you need to be willing to be changed by the actions of the Holy Spirit in your life. You need to place your trust in the Lord.

Jesus asked the man at the well if he wanted to be healed and how does the man respond.

John 5:7-9

⁷The sick man answered him, “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.”

⁸Jesus said to him, “Get up, take up your bed, and walk.” ⁹And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.

Do you see where he went first? ‘I have no one to put me in the pool’. He went to the people of the world first. Here is God right in front of him, offering him healing and his mind is still on worldly things. His hope and faith were in himself, in the world around him and in the healing power of the pool. All of his faith was in the wrong place.

What a reminder for Christians, it is not the amount of faith you have that matters, it is the object of your faith. This man had incredible faith in the healing powers of the pool, and if he had just a little faith in the man standing in front of him, he could be healed forever, the same way that the faith of the official saved his son and his entire family. The object of our faith matters.

Jesus questions him and then after the man responds gives him a command:

“Get up, take up your bed, and walk.”

And the man believes him, and that modicum of faith heals him completely. This man who had been invalid for 38 years, got up, rolled up his bed and walked away.

Jesus tells this man, ‘Get up, take up your bed and walk’ and this man is given the ability to do so. After 38 years of being an invalid, there is no way that he would have the muscular strength to do this, but because God told him that he could, he could.

When God gives his people a command and they obey, they are given the ability to do things that they could never do on their own.

Did you know in the book of Acts it says this?

Acts 17:30-31

The times of ignorance God overlooked, but now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will judge the world in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed; and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead.”

God commands us to repent and if we believe in him we can.

If we are blind to his Word, his truth, if we are invalid because of our sin, our greed, our hatred, our anger, our lust, our envy, our gluttony, our pride, our sloth. God gives us the ability to overcome them. He is asking us all if we want to be healed, if we want to be made whole, if we want to be reborn and have our lives freed of all of the infirmities of this world.

God sees you, God knows you and God speaks to you.

If God is asking you if you want to be healed, say yes, be converted, be changed and be committed to God and walk in this world as the Salt and Light of God's word in this dark and broken world.

Confirm our Faith and Hope in Your Grace and Mercy

Lord God, heavenly Father,
may your Holy Spirit strengthen our hearts
and confirm our faith and hope
in your grace and mercy.
Although we have reason to fear because of our conscience,
our sin and our unworthiness,
we may nevertheless, with the woman of Canaan,
hold fast to your grace
and in every trial and temptation
find you a very present help and refuge;
through your beloved Son, Jesus Christ our Lord,
who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit,
one true God, now and forever.

Source: d. 1549, Lent 2

Hymn: “They’ll Know We Are Christians by Our Love”

We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
 We are one in the Spirit, we are one in the Lord
 And we pray that our unity will one day be restored
 And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
 Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

We will work with each other, we will work side by side
 We will work with each other, we will work side by side
 And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride
 And they'll know we are Christians by our love, by our love
 Yeah, they'll know we are Christians by our love.

Invitation to Offering**Offering Prayer****Closing Hymn: “Breathe on Me Breath of God”****Pastoral Prayer**

God of grace,
 You are our Judge and our Hope.
 Transform us with your love and harness our energy for your purposes in the world
 into which Christ came and for which he died.

We pray for the Church facing the challenges of rebuilding ministry and mission
 amid the uncertainties of this world.

Where congregations are tempted to conform to society and blur your truths,
 where members magnify differences instead of celebrating Christ,
 where energy for leadership and community life has grown weaker,
 send your healing and transforming grace.

We pray for relationships suffering under the stress.
 Where families are tempted to nurse grudges and harbour complaints,
 where friendships have been wounded by misunderstanding or neglect,
 where workplace tensions have arisen over clashing opinions or exhausting
 demands,
 send your reconciling and restoring mercy.

We pray for the world filled with increasing threats and conflicts.
 Where countries are torn by unrest and persecution,

where communities are diminished by prejudice and discrimination,
where those with power and authority degrade or dismiss their critics,
empower those who work for just solutions and advocate for the powerless.

We pray for all who are troubled and find it hard to face these uncertain times,
we pray for those who face illness or loss of any kind,
for those challenged by economic hardship,
and for those faced with the reality of death, their own or of someone dear.
Embrace each one with your compassion and courage.

Even as we remember the many challenges around us,
we give you thanks for the blessings we know,
for moments of pleasure,
for laughter shared,
for conversations that brightened a day.
Thank you for your steadfast love
and the comfort we draw from your presence with us in all things.
In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, we pray. **Amen.**

Benediction

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding,
guard your hearts and minds in the knowledge and love of God,
and of God's Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord;
and the blessing of God almighty,
the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit,
remain with you always. **Amen.**