

# *One for All, All for One*

John 5:1-16

Rev. Brett Shoemaker ~ November 8, 2020 ~ Faith Presbyterian Church

After these things there was a festival of the Jewish people, and so Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, with five porches. Sprawled out there was a mass of invalids: blind, lame, and maimed. There was one particular man who had been lying there for thirty-eight years in his sickness. When Jesus saw this man sprawled out there and learned that he had been there for such a long time, he said to him, "Would you like to be made well?" The sick man answered him, "Sir, I don't have a single human being who will put me into the pool when the water starts stirring! Every time I get to the pool, someone else gets in ahead of me." Jesus said to him, "Get up! Pick up your mat and start walking." And instantly the man was made well, and he picked up his mat and started walking.

Now that day was a Sabbath. So the Jewish people were saying to the healed man, "This is a Sabbath day, and you shouldn't be carrying your mat around like that!" But he said to them, "[Wait a minute], the man who made me well told me, 'Pick up your mat and start walking!'" They asked him, "Who is the man who told you to pick up your mat and start walking?" Now the healed man did not know who he was; you see, Jesus had slipped away when a crowd had formed.

Later on, Jesus found the man in the Temple and said to him, "Look, you have been made well. Now stop sinning so that something worse doesn't happen to you!" The man left and told the Jewish people that Jesus was the man who made him well. And that's why the Jewish people were starting to persecute Jesus, because he was doing these kinds of things on the Sabbath. (John 5:1-16, translation by Dale Bruner)

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What a week it's been! Actually, what a month. In fact, what a year! If we're really thinking about it, what a couple of millennia it's been! And here we are reading a story that happened approximately two thousand years ago, and claiming that a few minutes in the life of someone that lived that long ago has something meaningful to speak to us in November of 2020.

I invite you to take a deep breath, and pray with me that this story would speak to our hearts in a new way:

*Lord, may these words in Your story and the thoughts that move from our minds to our hearts and back again, be acceptable to You, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.*

Imagine with me if you will that you are at an event at your work or school or in a grand ballroom somewhere. The room is packed. People are having a great time. There are tasty treats coming around on trays from smiling people. Your favorite music is playing. As you are putting this scene together in your mind, you're probably already asking several questions:

Is everyone wearing a mask?  
Are they spread out and keeping a safe distance away?  
Are people dancing close together?  
Are the windows open? Is the air circulating in a healthy way?

(We've reached a point, where it's almost difficult to remember when we weren't asking these questions. That was only a year ago. But let's go back to the scene).

As you look around the room, you notice someone in the corner. I'll let you determine what this person looks like. Maybe it's someone you know, maybe it isn't. What is true is that it is obvious that this person is completely disengaged from everything else going on in the room. They seem preoccupied with something. There is some basic need not being met. Maybe a lack of companionship, or nourishment, or health, or peace of mind is keeping this person from interacting with any others. So, they are keeping to themselves.

Right at this moment, you have a choice to make. We have a choice to make.

Does anyone remember the *Choose Your Own Adventure* books? The ones where you get to pick what happens next? I loved those books when I was a kid! I think as we get older, we just want someone else to choose for us. Or we let our habits do the choosing.

Most of us have been in a similar situation in some way. If we look around whenever we're out, we are faced with similar situations every day. Also true enough, most of us have been in the place of the person in the

corner. These strange few months have brought about deep loneliness, fear, isolation, depression, and feelings of inadequacy for so many people.

Here's the obvious decision in our scenario: Do we move away from the crowd of the party and instead begin a conversation with this person in the corner?

The reality is that every day, every one of us faces this kind of choice.

Jesus, too, faced this choice so many times in his life. So many times, in fact, that we forget how disrupting it was.

The excerpt we have before us from Jesus' life is no exception. As the story begins, Jesus is heading up to Jerusalem for some kind of religious festival. It doesn't say *which* festival. We have to assume this was intentional on the part of this gospel writer. He's communicating a couple important things:

One, let's not over-think the meaning of this specific occasion. The truth of the matter is that Jesus showed up for events of the church. Even though on many occasions, Jesus seemed to challenge and even offend the church-goers, as he will later in this very story, Jesus showed up. He wanted to be a part of what was going on with God's people. He wasn't antagonistic to the rhythms of the church. He found a home within them even while he asked hard questions about intentions at times.

Two, Jesus would have been following a thick flow of humanity that would have been crowded and moving toward the temple, which happened during *any* festival. If we start with this image, then we can marvel and wonder at the detour Jesus takes. By detour, we cannot miss in these first couple of verses that Jesus does not end up in the place of mass appeal where everyone else was heading. On some street or some alleyway, Jesus would have had to leave the flow of traffic, and go in a different direction. Based on the rest of Jesus' life, we can't assume this was an accident.

The guided tour headed to gawk at the palace and the temple, and instead, Jesus walked away and went to the hospital.

I have to wonder how many times Jesus' followers were overheard saying, "Wait a minute! Where is he going this time? I thought we were...uh....oh well, here we go again."

"One for all, all for one" struck me as an appropriate title for today's message. Here's why. We have spent

this week especially, and the last several months generally, focused on the systems that will be in place for the next season in America. We have exerted ourselves toward lobbying for , and voting, in record numbers, for the things that will affect us all to the best of our ability as we understand it.

One for all and all for one simply means that the members do what's best for the whole, and the whole group supports its individual members. We've spent the time focused on the *all*, maybe it's time just for this week, to look around at the *ONEs* that are around us. When Jesus says, "Love one another as I have loved you," perhaps he wants us to take opportunities to be reminded not to miss the word *ONE*, because Jesus cared for the *ONEs* as a way to show his love for the *ALL*.

My encouragement this morning, if we watch the footsteps of Jesus, is to take a detour just for a moment, just for this week at least and really see the people around us, individuals, that Jesus has placed in our lives, especially those in the corners, many of which may have been neglected during this time.

Wendy and I are going through the marriage course right now. I know many of you are, too, online. This week was about conflict resolution. Dangerous topic. One brilliant takeaway this week: As partners, what if we woke up each day and asked: "How can I make your day better today?" Rather than focusing on what we will accomplish for the world, it shifts our focus dramatically if we turn to another individual that we pass by and ask, "How can I make your day better?"

Really, this is not a lot different from Jesus' question to this man...a man who hadn't walked in 38 years. "Would you like to be made well today?"

On Tuesday, many of us checked the election results online when we woke up. Then we checked it at lunch to see how things had changed. We checked it before using the restroom, then again afterwards, before and after brushing our teeth that night, and twice while we were brushing our teeth. It may have been our top search item, so we merely had to refresh our browser. Our attention has been immersed in the systems that govern our lives. We've spent time talking about our response to these things as God's people during worship, we've talked about it with our families, coworkers, Uber drivers, and some of us, if we're honest, even our pets...

What if we turned our attention just this week to an individual in our lives that could use a little attention.

There are so many layers to this story of Jesus; I hardly know where to begin. We could pick this story apart and dig into theological truths that could carry us well into Advent...of next year. But, before we get ahead of ourselves, let's not miss the simple compassion of Jesus. It says right in our text that Jesus came upon this place of five porches and discovered a "mass of invalids." This could also be pronounced accurately "in-valids;" those outside the walls of the temple during the festivals and outside of the life of the community because they were no longer considered valid members of society, left to fend for themselves.

I'm sure Jesus didn't know where to begin either, so he began with the one God put in his path, the one in front of him. Verse 5: "There was one particular man who had been lying there." Could he have healed everyone lying around? Sure. Jesus did that on one or two occasions. But, today, his heart reached out to this man, and everything else faded away in that moment. Maybe Jesus knew he was the one who had been there longest, and he asked if he wanted to be made well -- not as a medical or clinical question, but as one friend to another. Jesus was establishing a human connection with this man who makes the very human response of excuses instead of a direct answer.

Sometimes we're so busy worrying about the condition of the world, that we fail to notice the one right in front of us. Jesus shows us that it is not inhumane to sit with someone and connect and let the world fall apart -- or more accurately, to simply trust in a God that is big enough to handle the rest.

Minutes later, Jesus proves he not only has the power to conquer the sickness in this man's life and make him walk again, but the authority to challenge the system that put him there. One for all, all for one. Jesus' focus on this one relationship began the dominoes that led to a declaration of who he was, a moment that would begin to send his opponents into a spiral of accusations.

Jesus gave this man three simple commands:

Get up.  
Pick up your mat.  
Start walking.

And what did the people around him notice? Was it the walking? You would think that would be what set him apart, one who hadn't walked in thirty-eight years! Here he was skipping down the cobblestones! But what set him apart was his *mat*. He was the only one carrying anything. Why?

It was the Sabbath.

No one was allowed to carry anything on the Sabbath unless it was an emergency.

It would have been like a headless man at the store being given a head, but all people can notice is that he's not wearing a mask!

The people held so tightly to their rules, they'd forgotten what freedom looks like. They didn't even recognize a miraculous healing! Some theologians argue that the five porches around these pools symbolize the five books of the Jewish law, the five books that still make up the beginning of our Bible. They take the analogy to mean that people in that culture were so held captive in their misery by these five books of the law because they had forgotten that the law was meant to set them free; that this was the story of a faithful God who heals and rescues.

What is the very first law written in the Bible? You might be surprised.

On the seventh day, God rested -- then God blessed this day and made it holy.

Honoring the Sabbath was built into the Creation story the day after humans were created. It was a day of healing, a day of rest, and it was meant to free people from the weight of the rest of the week. Jesus honored the Sabbath, honored the spirit of the law, but people could only see he'd broken the letter of the law.

Jesus came not only to heal a particular man -- all for one. Jesus came to free the entire world from the letter of the law into a Spirit of grace, freedom, and healing -- healing one, for all!

My wife and I are divided, not when it comes to politics so much, but coffee shops. When we finish a run or bike ride together, she goes to one coffee shop and I go to another across the parking lot. We can't agree. Usually, we'll find each other before we consume our beverages. One morning this week, as I headed to the other coffee shop, she called me on the phone. She had encountered a woman in front of a nearby restaurant. Wendy asked if she needed anything. All she wanted was a turkey sandwich. For once, I wasn't feeling rushed, otherwise I might have been like the ones who get in the pool first when the water is stirred. I can come up with all kinds of excuses.

Wendy and I may be divided about coffee, but at that moment, we were united in a gesture of grace that offered healing for a woman at least for the day, of her hunger. We were able to make a connection of friendship. I don't tell you that to say we always find ourselves on the better end of honor. I would be

embarrassed to tell you other opportunities I've passed by.

I tell you the story to offer an invitation as a church at a time when we have experienced a tremendous amount of division in our country. Maybe simple compassion, and a turning toward those in the corners of our community will bring us back together, at least for this week, with the hope that this kind of grace will continue as a habit for much longer.

It seemed that almost every scene from the life of Jesus, in which he was surrounded by crowds, eventually led to some kind of encounter with an individual on the margins of life. Was it because he was Jesus? Partly, I think, it was. This is the way the heart of Jesus worked then, and still does now. Jesus' heart breaks for any person whose mind or body or spirit is not whole.

However.

This can be true of us as well.

One of the most important prayers we can pray is this:

"Lord, let our hearts break for the things that break your heart."<sup>1</sup>

Perhaps you've prayed this before. But let me offer this warning: It's also one of the most dangerous prayers we can pray. God, in God's mercy, I don't think ever fully answers that prayer. I don't think our hearts could handle it! Also, it would significantly mess up our daily plans, not to mention our life goals, if we walked into our work places, schools, social situations, or even just down the street allowing our hearts to break in precisely the way Jesus' heart broke. The way we talk to our own families would be the first thing to be impacted.

In terms of our own busy schedules, it takes a shift, a turning down a different street or alleyway, to see where God may lead. We have so much going on in our own country, that we may not be aware of the civil unrest that threatens lives in other places, affecting friends and families of ours in other countries. Ethiopia is one of those places. Our church alone sponsors nearly a hundred individual children in the Abaya region there, but right now, people live constantly in fear, and many have lost lives and loved ones. The organization we work with, as many of you know, is World Vision. The founder, Bob Pierce, is the one who first prayed the prayer, "Lord let my heart break for the things that

break your heart." Interesting that it's based on the model that we give attention to one particular child as a way of eventually raising up an entire community around that child. All for one. One for all.

When we pray this prayer, our focus will shift. So be careful. But, I want to give us an opportunity to pray this prayer together, and to take at least this week to pray this prayer and watch for answers in three different ways. This is what I believe God is telling us every day, that we will become more aware of:

Every day, I believe God puts someone we KNOW on our minds to reach out to. They may be in our families, or neighborhoods, or only connected through social media. If we ask God to put someone on our heart to pray for and connect with, there will always be someone.

Next, every day, I believe God also puts someone we DON'T KNOW in our way that surprises us. For every single one of us. It may be someone on the street corner holding a sign, or a cashier having a tough day. We never know what needs we'll uncover when we pray that prayer.

Lastly, every day, I believe God invites US (you and I, no matter what age you are or how long you've been a follower of Jesus) to be in the place of the lame man. God is constantly whispering not only to the whole world, but also to you and to me, privately wanting us to hear a voice that draws us near, and reminds us we are loved. And when we take the time to hear it, we gain the strength and compassion to do the first two.

So, let's take a week.

A week to check in with the world, sure, there's a lot going on. But also, to turn away from binge watching the news for a minute and toward individuals that have been neglected in our paths during this process.

Let's take a week...in hopes that the spirit of Christ indwells us and reminds us what kind of God can love us this much.

And let's pray it lasts well beyond this week.

Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Attributed first to Bob Pierce, founder of World Vision International.

## The Next Step

### *A resource for Life Groups and/or personal application*

1. Read the story from John 5:1-16 once more. Do you notice anything that you didn't notice before?
2. What about Jesus' interaction with this man most surprises you?
3. How might the time Jesus spent here be different from what his followers expected as he entered Jerusalem?
4. How did Jesus use this encounter to change the way people thought about who he is and why he came?
5. The attention Jesus gives to the lame man seems to ignore the larger system that leaves him in his condition. But how was Jesus also challenging that system at the same time?
6. Are there individuals in your own life that God has called you to reach out to in some way? What would that look like during this time?
7. How can we be more aware of individuals God may put in our path each day – encounters for which we cannot prepare, encounters that surprise us?
8. Lastly, is Jesus asking you in some way, "Would you like to be made well?" In light of this passage, what might be your response?



**Suggested Scriptures for the Week**, as we offer God at least 1% of our day (15 minutes or more) focused on His Word and prayer.

Monday:	1 Corinthians 2/Psalm 71
Tuesday:	1 Corinthians 3/Psalm 72
Wednesday:	1 Corinthians 4/Psalm 73
Thursday:	1 Corinthians 5/Psalm 74
Friday:	1 Corinthians 6/Psalm 75
Saturday:	1 Cor. 7:1-16 / Psalm 76
Sunday:	1 Cor. 7:17-40 / Psalm 77