

John 5:1–15
Fri. of Invocabit (Ember Day)
Kaiserslautern Ev. Luth. Ch.
Alte Kapelle, Landstuhl
February 23, 2024

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Dearly bought hearers by the blood of Jesus Christ,

Every detail in the Scriptures, particularly in the Gospel of John, is filled with meaning. At least that's the way the church used to read the Scriptures. Always digging and coming up with more treasures. Always casting the net and finding more fish. Always asking and receiving better answers than we could have hoped for, always searching and finding, seeking and receiving, knocking at the door, and entering into the mysteries of God. Jesus Christ is the key to all the Scriptures. In Him, everything holds together and makes sense.

There was in Jerusalem, the city of peace, by the sheep gate a pool. Apparently the sheep gate was the gate used to bring the sacrificial lambs to the temple, to be slaughtered and atone for the sins of the people. Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world in His death on the cross and He comes to the sheep gate, seeking the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

By the sheep gate, there was a pool called "Bethesda," which translated from the Aramaic means: "house of grace." It's no wonder many Christian charitable agencies have been called "Bethesda." The house of grace had five roofed colonnades where a multitude of invalids would lay—those who could not see, those who could not walk, and those who could not move whatsoever. This must have been like walking into a hospital, or a nursing home: a pitiable sight with so many unfortunate souls, yet nevertheless people made in the image and likeness of God.

Since the time of St. Augustine, even the five pillars are interpreted in a spiritual sense. Why else would John mention this seemingly insignificant detail? What does five indicate in the Scriptures? For the Jews, it refers to the five books of Moses. This interpretation makes sense when you realize this healing took place during a feast of the Jews and on the Sabbath. Jesus is showing that He is the God of Israel, the one the Jews are celebrating with their feasts, the one who gave the Sabbath to man for healing and restoration. How could He not heal on this day and at this time? That's what God does! Jesus is the main character in the Five Books of Moses. And later in this same chapter, Jesus will say: "There is one who accuses you: Moses, on whom you have set your hope. For if you believed Moses, you would believe me, for he wrote of me. But if you do not believe his writings, how will you believe my words?"

The paralyzed man was 38 years old. Is this a historical detail? Yes, but it is also more than that. In Deuteronomy, the fifth book of Moses, the people rebel and murmur against God. The LORD says: "Not one of these men of this evil generation shall see the good land which I swore to give to your fathers (Deut 1:26–35). In Deuteronomy 2, we learn that it is then 38 years before that generation died off. Thirty-eight is the time of Israel's sin. It is the time allotted for the evil and adulterous generation to pass away and for the new Israel to enter the promised land. The paralyzed man laying in the house of grace, unable to bring himself to healing, is renewed by the LORD Himself. He is raised to new life!

Although the man never entered the water, the water of Bethesda, the house of grace, reminds us of the waters of Holy Baptism, the waters of new birth and of new life. We are born paralyzed, unable to help ourselves. We cannot crawl to the water on our own and be healed. Everything is holding us back. But then Jesus comes and summons us. Rise and walk in newness of life. We actually entered the water, stirred by the angels for the healing of the nations. It was poured upon us and the old man in us was drowned so that a new man could arise and live before God in righteousness and purity forever. Behold, the old has passed away, the new has come!

Later in the Temple, Jesus finds the man and warns him: "See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you." This is the lesson we take away as well, especially during this season of repentance, the season of Lent. The LORD has saved you. He has washed away your sins in Holy Baptism. So how could you return to your old ways? How can we who died to sin still live in it? We were buried with Jesus by baptism into death, in order that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, we too might walk in newness of life. Consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God. Let not sin reign in your mortal body. Sin will have no dominion over you since you are not under law but under grace. Return often, return daily to the waters of Baptism in repentance; not to get rebaptized. You are only born again once through the washing of water with the Word (Eph 5:26). Return to your Baptism by confessing your sins and living out your sonship once again. The Shepherd continues looking for His sheep. In Jesus, you come to the house of grace. In the name of Jesus, Amen.

The peace of God, which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen. We chant the Magnificat.