

This message was prepared by Rev. Pamela Graf Short for the People of Prayer of the Tontogany Presbyterian Church and the Veterans of the Lybarger-Grimm American Legion Post 441, for May twenty sixth, the sixth Sunday of the season of Resurrection in the year of our LORD two thousand and nineteen. Is it based on the following Scriptures:

Psalm 67

May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face to shine upon us,
That your way may be known upon earth, your saving power among all nations.
Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
Let the nations be glad and sing for joy, for you judge the peoples with equity and guide the nations upon earth.
Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you.
The earth has yielded its increase; God, our God, has blessed us.
May God continue to bless us; let all the ends of the earth revere God.

Revelation chapter 21:1-5; 22-26; & chapter 22:1-5

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth;
For the first heaven and the first earth had passed away,
And the sea was no more.
And I saw the holy city, the New Jerusalem,
Coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.
And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying,
 "See, the home of God is among mortals.
 God will dwell with them;
 They will be God's peoples, and God himself will be with them;
 God will wipe every tear from their eyes.
 Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more,
 For the first things have passed away."
And the One who was seated on the throne said,
 "See, I am making all things new."
I saw no temple in the city,
For its temple is the Lord God the Almighty and the Lamb.
And the city has no need of sun or moon to shine on it,
For the glory of God is its light, and its lamp is the Lamb.
The nations will walk by its light,
And the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it.
Its gates will never be shut by day—and there will be no night there.
People will bring into it the glory and the honor of the nations.
Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal,
Flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb
Through the middle of the street of the city.
On either side of the river is the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit,
Producing its fruit each month;
And the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations.
Nothing accursed will be found there anymore.
But the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it,
And God's servants will worship God;
They will see God's face, and God's name will be on their foreheads.
And there will be no more night; they need no light of lamp or sun,
For the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

John 5:1-13

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

Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed.

One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years.

When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?"

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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me."

Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk."

At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a Sabbath.

So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat."

But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk.' "

They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take it up and walk'?"

Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there.

In our Bible story for today Jesus pays attention to the forgotten and extends mercy to the broken.

38 years is a long time to lay by a pool and wait for healing.

38 years of not being seen.

38 years of having no one to help.

38 years of being too bent to stand
and too broken to hobble.

As veterans you know what it is to wait for healing;

to go to the VA hospitals with long lines
and longer waits for tests to be scheduled.

You know what it is to no longer be seen.

O once people oohhed and aahhed at your uniform.

Once you were saluted as you walked past another soldier or sailor or marine.

But now many people have long since forgotten your service;

perhaps even you have forgotten what it feels like to stand tall and look sharp.

But being in military service is not really about looking sharp, is it?

Being in military service is about

preparing for battle;

committing to serve;

protecting those in your unit;

stepping into the horrors of war near and far.

I think it is fair to say that war breaks everyone:

every child who shivers in fear as neighbor's homes explode and soldiers burst in looking for the enemy;

every mother who weeps while on her hands and knees mopping the floor and praying without words for her son;

every father who drives his first born to the bus station saying "You know you don't have to do this";

every sister who begs her brother and begs him again to get out before it is too late;

every husband who sends his wife off to travel over mountain passes or along land mine infested roads;

every private or ensign or seaman or petty officer or master gunnery or lieutenant or general—no one can escape—everyone is broken by war.

I am curious about the character in the Bible story. What caused his brokenness?

Do you think he had been a soldier?

Do you think he was wounded as a child by a horse ripping through his town as a centurion threw a flaming torch on his home?

Do you think he was beaten in a drunken brawl as he sought to drown his memories in fifth of whiskey?

I am curious about why he is so alone:

I have no one to help me into the pool.

I have no one to help me.

I have no one.

How many of our veterans have said this,

have felt this,

have lived this

hour by hour,

town by town,

illness by illness:

I have no one to help me to the hospital.

I have no one to help me pay my rent.

I have no one to help me pour my coffee.

I have no one to help.

I have no one.

In the Bible story the religious people who held political power had no concern for this man.

They were annoyed that Jesus healed him on the Sabbath day;

that Jesus broke the rules;

that Jesus went around their system of oppression and chose healing over harm

and engagement over apathy.

When I see a veteran begging for a dollar,

do I look down and pretend to be distracted; to not notice?

When you hear of a veteran whose mind has been broken by war, do you say, “O that’s too bad”

and then never think of her again?

When we find out that a child is growing up without a father because of a war that someone we voted for initiated,

do we shirk any sense of responsibility for our actions and say,

“There is nothing I can do.

Every politician does it.

It has always been this way.”

Jesus makes a different choice.

He refuses to be held hostage by the politicians of the day.

First Jesus sees the man.

Jesus pays attention.

Next Jesus listens to the man’s story.

Jesus learns something about him.

Then Jesus does something that we tend to avoid: Jesus speaks directly to the man.
Jesus treats him with dignity.
Before healing him,
Jesus asks him a question of the heart:
“Do you want to be made well?”
A more accurate translation is
“Do you want to be made whole?”

You see when our bodies are broken,
it is often the case that our minds are bent
and our hearts are shattered
and our souls are cracked.
When our bodies are broken
for days
for years
for decades
we get rather used to living with a certain familiarity of woundedness.
We assume that what is will always be
and how we are now will never really change.
But that is not God’s story and it need not be our story.

The question Jesus is asking all of us;
the question Jesus is asking you today is:
Do you want to be made well?
Do you want to be made whole?

It is possible that Jesus will simply say to a wounded warrior
“Get up. Pick up your mat and walk.”
It is possible that God will work outside of the laws of nature and that warrior will be made well instantly.

Yes, but it is also quite possible and very, very likely that God will work through your eyes,
your attention,
your listening ears,
through your respect for the dignity of others;
that it will be because of your love that a veteran is made well;
made whole;
made to walk in this world with a heart that has been healed
and a spirit that has been bolstered by your care.

Perhaps God is planning a divine appointment for you even as we speak. Listen to this story:

Allen Hoe from Hawaii was a combat medic in the Viet Nam war. Continuing that legacy both his sons joined the military. In January in the year of our LORD 2005 Allen’s eldest son, First Lieutenant Nainoa K. Hoe was killed in action in Iraq.
Later that same year, Allen decided to get up and he made the flight from Hawaii to Washington D.C. for the Memorial Day ceremonies that were being held at the Viet Nam Women’s Memorial. Allen wore a button with a picture of his son and he brought along a symbol of his culture, a lei. Here is the rest of the story:

<https://storycorps.org/animation/the-last-viewing/>

Whose story is God calling you to hear?
Will you be ready to listen?
Are you asking God to make you an agent of healing?
To set for you a divine appointment with a veteran waiting to be made whole?

As the American Legion you band together in dignity.
You remember one another.
You listen to one another.
You see one another.
You call all of us to see
To hear
To remember

To remember after a year passes
To remember after a decade passes
To remember after 38 years pass
To remember as long as we have
a mind to think
and a heart to feel
and a word of hope to share.

For indeed there is coming a day when God will wipe away all your tears;
when the leaves of the trees will be for the healing of the nations.
When every warrior will see the face of God and stand at attention in the presence of the One who ready to
make you whole,
make you holy
and make you wholly God's.

Now may our God of Resurrection Love
The One who remembers your story
Look upon you with tender compassion
Listen to you with attentive dignity
And call your body, mind and spirit to
Wholeness, Honor, Joy and Peace.
Now and for all eternity.
Alleluia! Alleluia! Alleluia! Amen