



The Cathedral of St. Andrew - Honolulu

Sermon: Year C – Sixth Sunday of Easter – May 26, 2019: The Man on Alakea Street

In this morning's gospel they call the pools with healing waters *Bethzatha*. Other translations call them *Bethesda*, which is probably why we have that famous hospital in Maryland by the same name—it's a place that heals. There's also the Bethesda Fountain in Central Park with a beautiful bronze angel looking down upon the waters as people sit by them to take photos, chat, and visit. I don't know that those particular waters are healing, but in a way maybe they are, because being by them seems to soothe people and mellow them out.

And then there's the original Bethesda, near the Sheep's Gate in the city of Jerusalem with its five porticos and the intricate system of what was once a set of pools where today you can crawl through and go what seems like three to four stories down into the ground. Even today it's a pretty bustling place and I can imagine what it was like when it was full of water that people believed had healing powers.

But when you really think about it, Jesus doesn't say that those waters are magic; even though the paralytic believes that they are and that he has to be put into them by someone. All Jesus says is this:

- *Do you want to be made well?*
- *Stand up, take your mat and walk.*

It's this man's desire to seek out something greater than himself that makes him well. It's not the water that he actually never goes into. It's his faith.

Bethesda is an incredible place with palatable spiritual energy that vibrates its way into your core. And it's a great privilege that very few get to travel there and be where this story took place.

But really, all we have to do is walk down the street if we want to see people who need healing or who are biblical characters alive and well in our midst today—or maybe a better way to say it is to say made manifest in our midst today, because sadly, not all of them are alive anymore. All we have to do is walk down the street.

About six weeks ago Dixie and I walked down Alakea Street to The Water Drop Café on the corner of Queen to have lunch. We sat there and had vegetarian Chinese food and talked story and when we were done and it was time to walk back to the Cathedral, we were on the same block as the restaurant and I saw a man fast asleep in one of the porticos of the building. There were two policemen standing very nonchalantly by their cars getting ready to deal with him—to go to over tell him to wake up and move on. But when I looked again at the man I realized that he wasn't asleep—he was dead. About an hour later Fr. Hee drove by and saw the same scene, only this time the man was covered up with a drop cloth, a simple shroud.

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Years ago when I lived on Kinau Street, I used to go down to the gym after work and then come back to the office to catch up on a few things before going home. And when it got dark, there was a couple that used to sleep on goza mats outside my door. This was back before we had security guards patrolling the campus and I would often see people sleeping in the hedges or at various points on the property, especially by the columbarium.

And one night as I was leaving and I saw this couple, something told me not to just keep walking toward my car but to say hello and ask their names. And from there I listened to a story—a story of people who were willing to work but who were having hard luck after the crash of 2008 and who couldn’t seem to get back on their feet so that they could pay rent after being kicked out of their apartment in Wahiawa.

And frankly, at the time, I felt I was living into the Baptismal Covenant by listening to their story and honoring the admonition of the Episcopal Church to seek and serve Christ in all persons and respect the dignity of every human being and I don’t know that I was really doing any of that; but I do think there is one thing that I got right that evening and without even knowing it—and it’s what Jesus did in this morning’s Gospel story as people were walking over the paralyzed man on his mat in order to get to the pool for themselves without worrying about him. The one thing I got right is that I noticed. I acknowledged. I saw.

That’s all I’m asking us to do this morning. That’s what I’m asking us to do to make this story come alive and relevant in the streets of Honolulu today. As to what each of us is supposed to do after we notice, I leave that up to God to sort out with you as you continue to work toward feeling God’s presence into making manifest God’s love. I’m not asking the response to be the same.

I’m actually not asking for a response at all. I’m just asking each of us to notice, because I trust that the prayers of this community and the inward and spiritual grace that will be made manifest in the sacrament will stir each of us to do what we believe God is telling us is right.

So for now, I’m asking that all we do is notice—the way Jesus noticed that man on that mat by what he thought was healing waters, but the healing took place instead because someone noticed, someone acknowledged, someone listened, and someone showed love. I know this is something we can all do and I know that this is something we are all called to do.

And now, for that poor man who died on our streets, let us pray:

Into your hands, O merciful Savior, we commend your servant whose name we do not know. Acknowledge, we humbly beseech you, a sheep of your own fold, a lamb of your own flock, a sinner of your own redeeming. Receive him into the arms of your mercy, into the blessed rest of everlasting peace, and into the glorious company of the saints in light. May his soul and the souls of all the departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace.

Amen.