



MEN'S DAY

LECTIONARY COMMENTARY

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Lection – The Gospel of John 5:1-16 (New Revised Standard Version)

(v. 1) After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. (v. 2) Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. (v. 3) In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. (v. 4) For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had. (v. 5) One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. (v. 6) 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?” (v. 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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me.” (v. 8) Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” (v. 9) At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. (v. 10) 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.” (v. 11) But he

answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” (v. 12) They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” (v. 13) Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. (v. 14) Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin anymore, so that nothing worse happens to you.” (v. 15) The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. (v. 16) Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the Sabbath.

I. Description of the Liturgical Moment

During a brief era of optimism (1865-1875), the fore parents of today’s black church created a religious heritage inspired by the prospect of racial progress. Once freedom came, the black church was a vessel ferrying rejoicing black men across Jordan towards the banks of beckoning civic equality. Men’s Day was then and remains today an integral part of that heritage.

When the freedmen were threatened by gathering clouds of re-enslavement and peonage (1875-1901), the celebration of black manhood became even more important. The threatened loss of the prospect of freedom during the Dubois-themed ‘Nadir’ or ‘emergency’ period (1901-1954) transformed the black church into a struggling lifeboat drifting towards an unseen heaven on a stagnant ocean of oppression.

Their once ecstatic shouts now turned into groans of bloody suffering (1901-1954), black men in great numbers climbed aboard that struggling black church life boat. From the bow and hull of that battered lifeboat (she has landed many thousands!) poured the pent up resources of black manhood that peopled and powered the Civil Rights Movement (1954-1972). This expeditionary landing force represented an insurgent and militant hope of a returning day of jubilee.

Much progress has been made since then. Yet, today’s Men’s Day celebrations are taking place as history seems to be repeating itself with cruel irony. Despite the ascension of Barack Obama to the mountaintop, the presidential peak appears to overlook a valley of atavistic racial recidivism where black male emasculation continues on the economic plantation (1972-2010). I submit that the celebration of historic Men’s Day in worship must become a designing moment of salvific strategy. The traditional Men’s Day displays of black suits and red ties must give way to a paradigm shift. What is needed is a resurrection of practicable hope among these rightful inheritors of Simon’s legacy. Black men must be challenged to bear the cross through preaching and worship on this special day. Then they must be equipped to continue the process *every day*.

II. Biblical Interpretation for Preaching and Worship: John 5:1-16

Part One: The Contemporary Context of the Interpreter

Like the events at Bethesda, Men’s Day must present a salvific opportunity, not just a ceremonial exercise. Paying tribute to the pool is not the same as experiencing the troubling of the water. Jesus sets out to expose the disconnect between the feast (v. 1) and the lack of faith fruit (v. 7).

This disconnect leads us to choose empty “Celebration” (v. 1) over the “fulfillingness” (thank you, Stevie Wonder!) of a “Challenge” being met (v. 8). This need not be the case. Like the pool at Bethesda, the black church was designed to be generous in provision (five porches), but both the pool then and the church now have become choked with a suffering crowd (v. 3). This dressed up, messed up, Men’s Day crowd is characterized by limited strength (impotence), limited vision (blindness), limited mobility (halt), and limited productivity (withered).

The man in v. 5 represents the crowd then and our Men’s Day crowd now. Both groups were and are waiting on relief from an undeniably divine but notoriously sporadic source of healing – the pool/church (v. 4). This man’s pain and ours are compounded by the “Rules and Regulations” which prevent traditional religious approaches from rescuing the ox in the ditch, the man on the porch, or the brother on the corner at what we term inopportune moments/on the Sabbath. (v. 10).

Part Two: Biblical Commentary

Jesus preaches a sermon in John 5:6-14 that presents a strategy for the man’s delivery. The man’s response is to worship in a manner that provides us with a strategy for empowerment. It is the function of preaching and worship to establish an informational and inspirational foundation for the paradigmatic transformation of the Men’s Day motif. Preaching is the announcement of a **strategy** – whether for the reanimation of dry bones (Ezekiel 37) or the incarnation of God’s salvific plan (Luke 3). Worship is an environment created when willing recruits drawn by the announcement of the strategy begin to come together, stand up, breathe and get ready to do battle (Ezekiel 37). Or become inspired, informed, and incarnate as regards to evangelism and ministry (“What then shall we do?” Luke 3:10, 12, 14).

Jesus comes preaching in John 5:6-14 and the man worships in the same pericope – presenting us with the follow-up strategy so obviously missing in some of our annual day celebrations. Jesus’ Preaching: John 5:6-14 – Presents a call to prayer (meaningful dialogue with Him) as an aggressive response to the available power of God rather than a passive surrender to the transitory paralysis of emasculation.

... v. 6a (**When He saw him lie...**) Tells us to do something about what we see.

... v. 6b (**... and knew that he had been now a long time in that case...**) Urges us to exhibit compassion rather than mere sympathy.

... v. 6c (**...he saith unto him, Wilt thou be made whole?**) Challenges the man to consider doing something he cannot comprehend without further maturation, teaching and equipping - the difference between mere wellness and true wholeness.

... v. 7... Jesus prompts the man to present his side of the story. We must hear the real life problems of our men in order to design strategies for real time relief.

... v. 8...Challenges the man to make a meat-level response to a milk-level problem rather than remain captive in a milk-level response to a meat-level problem.

... vv. 9-14...Reveals to the man the consequences of failing to continue to grow and be mature in the ministry he has now been equipped to carry-out.

The Man's Worship: John 5:6-14 – Illustrates a true worship experience over a ceremonial ineffective one. True worship “strengthens the feeble knees” of spiritual immaturity. True worship (in spirit and truth – not a mere order of service) challenges the worshipper to experience relief and deliverance in both the immediate and ultimately the permanent sense. Immediate means right now forgiveness and rising – ultimate means through further teaching, equipping, and engagement in ministry to his fellow sufferers on the porch/street corner by...

...v. 6a... recognizing that the church views his condition with compassion;

...v. 6b... being tired enough of his condition to hazard getting out of the waiting lines of traditional ineffective spiritual non-solutions;

...v. 6c... intriguing him with the possibility of a real ministry;

...v. 7... helping him realize that even legitimate excuses do not release one from the inconvenient demands of the kingdom;

...v. 8... prompting him to move beyond the shallow theology of only RISING (which is where most of today's popular preaching and worship motifs leave us) to TAKING UP... and WALKING (a process of maturation and deep water stewardship); and

...vv. 9-14... helping him realize that the new wine of potency, vision, mobility, and productivity cannot fit in the Templestic business as usual environment. You cannot join the ranks of the 'Rulers and Regulators' when you have been freed by a revolutionary dosage of preaching and worship! Mere Men's Day celebration on Sunday will return as worse sin on Monday!

Celebration

Most preaching of the passage would end at v. 15. But victory lies at v. 16! The crucifixion of the Savior, a greater affliction and outrage committed upon him than all our light and momentary afflictions combined – is both a comfort in our trials as well as the ultimate means of our true deliverance. There is better water! Men, trade in your frustrating wait at sporadic pools of temporal religious apathy and beg Him to give you THIS water! In keeping with the text, a pool-type of song says, “Come to THIS fountain so rich and sweet. Cast thy poor soul at the Savior's feet. Plunge in today and be made complete. Glory to His Name!”¹

Note

1. "Glory to His Name." By Elisha A. Hoffman, 1878.