

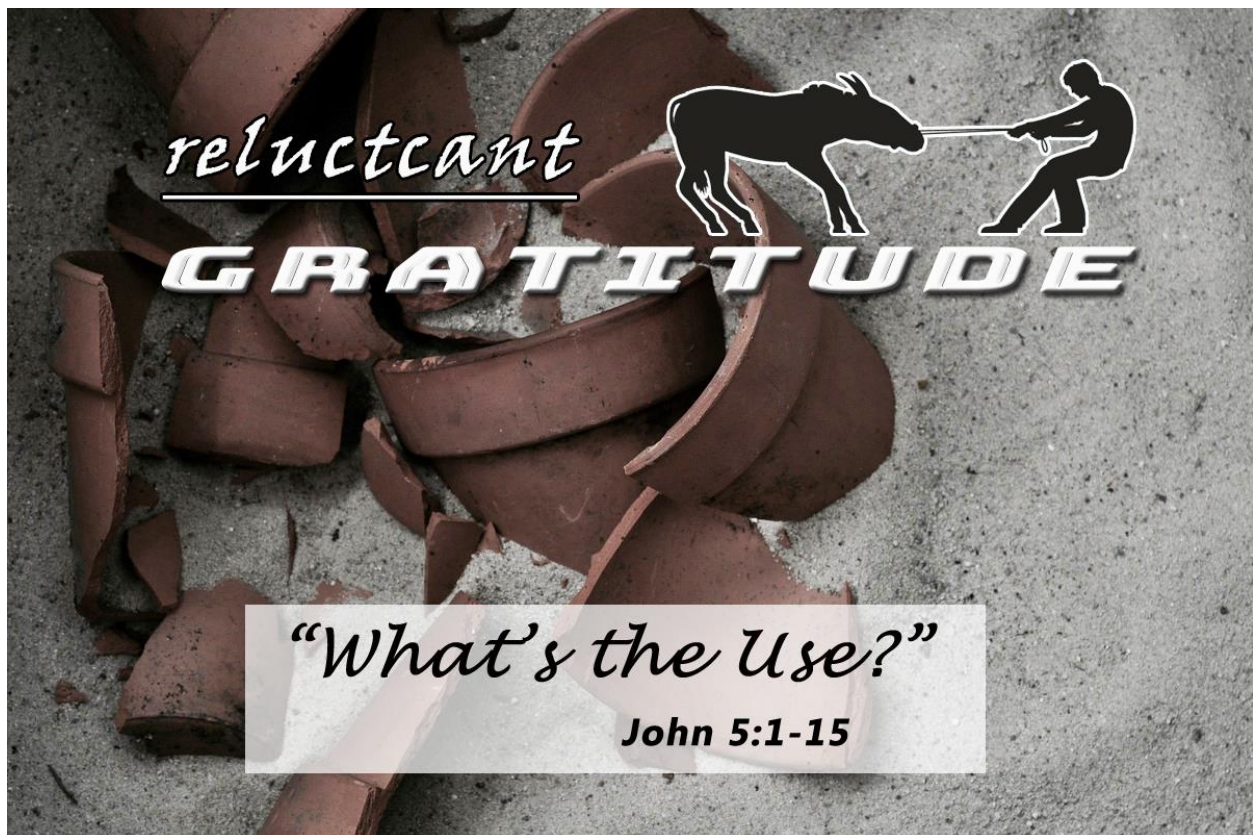
November 12 – “What’s the Use?”

The Pool at Bethesda

John 5:1-15

Special Music: Jesus Heal me Carman

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdorCofdXgw>



John 5:1-15

1 Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals.

2 Now there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

3 Here a great number of disabled people used to lie—the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, waiting for the moving of the waters.

[4] For an angel went down at a certain time into the pool and stirred up the water; then whoever stepped in first, after the stirring of the water, was made well of whatever disease he had.*

5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, “Do you want to get well?”

7 “Sir,” the invalid replied, “I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me.”

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

9 At once the man was cured; he picked up his mat and walked.

The day on which this took place was a Sabbath,

10 and so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, “It is the Sabbath; the law forbids you to carry your mat.”

11 But he replied, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’”

12 So they asked him, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?”

13 The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

14 Later Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, “See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you.”

15 The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

A BETTER WAY

**It matters not how hard I try
Or even if I question why.
I lay face into the dust,
An inside voice telling me I must
Rise to my feet and sanctify.**

**But I also know without a doubt,
Not withstanding what it's all about
But when I rise and stand once more
Fall back again, sick and sore,
Seen by others as a lay about.**

**If only I could reach my goal
Let the water make me whole.
Then I could stand and walk away
Keep the disease and pain at bay
Leave my past and save my soul.**

**I have accepted that I cannot win.
My bones are frail, my body thin.
Long ago I lost my fire,
And find that now I lack desire.
Instead, here I rest like a manakin.**

Reach, reach, reach, I cry,
And then I give way to alibi.
For there is no hope
And I cannot cope.
My purpose no longer justified.

My courage lost, no longer dignified,
And so, I change my battle cry
What is the use
Of my self-abuse?
I will lay here, pale and ossified.

When all is lost there comes a hand
To lift me from the shifting sand,
And provide me with a better choice,
And give me reason to rejoice.
I never really needed what I planned.

What I thought was my only way
Promising to never let my purpose stray
Until another path was shone
To heal my sick and tired bones
A healing touch for this castaway.

I had placed my hope in an age old myth,
Which had only caused my soul to shift.
But once again I've found my place,
And I sing a song of endless grace.
For Jesus freely offered me his gift.

**I found my faith was just painted chalk
Smearred and scuffed upon a crooked walk
Until Jesus offered something better
As I allowed him to break my fetter,
To me he said, "Take up your mat and walk."**

Once again, we have a story that we have touched on before that could actually be split into an entire series of messages. But we are still focused on Reluctant Gratitude today, and we are looking at “What’s the Use.” What happens to our gratitude when we pour all of our faith into something we believe is the ultimate answer, only to be denied the expected blessing over and over and over again? Don’t we start to wonder if God is even listening to us? Does he see what we are doing? How we are suffering?

In today’s story from John, we have a man who has been an invalid for thirty-eight years. We don’t know how long he had been having his family and friends bring him to the pool or if he just stayed there all the time. But Jesus learned he had been in his current predicament for a very long time. He wasn’t even strong enough to make it into the pool when the waters stirred so that he could be healed. But it is undeniable that he believed in the potential healing of the pool, because he had been doing this for such a long time.

He had also given up hope that he would ever be able to get to the pool when the water stirred because he had no one to help him. He simply was unable to do it on his own. He saw no way out of his predicament. He had tunnel vision. The only way he could envision ever getting healed was if someone helped him into the pool. He was way beyond looking for help from doctors and religious leaders, friends, family and total strangers. He had given up. And yet, he was still showing up every day. He still lived in a bubble of hope, even after all the years of struggle.

There once was a very proud goose that lived in a pond near a quiet meadow. Life was good for the goose, until one day in her second season she had garnered a broken wing when she flew into a tree. Although the goose had survived, she no longer had the ability to fly. So, she was pretty much relegated to living at the pond. Which was okay because she liked the pond, the meadow, and her surroundings. However, food was somewhat scarce and finding something to eat was problematic since she couldn't fly.

Flocks of geese would come and go at the pond, and oh how the goose envied them and wanted to join them on their journey. Still, she enjoyed their company when they were around.

There was a cobblestone bridge that crossed the pond and every day the goose watched as children crossed the bridge on their way to and from school. The activities of the little humans lightened her mood and took her mind off her hunger. Every day, a few of the children would stop in the middle of the bridge and drop bread into the water to feed the geese. This would have been great for our scrawny goose, but usually the flock migrating through would get to the bread long before she could. She felt that if she could just find a way to beat the flock to the bread then she would be satisfied. But the geese in the flock were bigger than she was and they were far more nimble with their strong wings. They seldom left any bread for the malnourished goose. It was so very disappointing, and the goose became very discouraged over time.

One day, a small boy stopped on the bridge and looked down into the water. There he saw a flock of geese. Other children joined him at the bridge rail

and began tossing bread into the water. The flock of geese rushed over, pushing and shoving each other out of the way trying to eat as much of the bread as possible, even stealing it out of each other's mouths. After all, they were migrating and needed the energy.

The boy looked toward the bank and noticed the sickly goose, waiting patiently in the rushes. Unlike the other geese, she didn't rush and push her way forward to try and get a share of the food. The boy knew that there must have been something wrong with the goose, so he decided to get a better look. He finished crossing the bridge and made his way to the edge of the pond where the neglected goose was resting. He noticed the goose's broken wing and realized what was probably going on.

Although he felt pity for the goose, he knew that he would be unable to fix her wing, but he could make sure that the goose got to eat. He reached into his lunch sack and took out half a sandwich which he offered to the goose. Well, the goose could hardly believe it. She kept looking over at the throng of geese fighting for bits and pieces of bread and here was this boy offering her a half of a sandwich which she wouldn't even have to struggle for.

The goose gladly accepted the sandwich, and it filled her up. From then on, every day the boy would stop by the pond and feed the goose from the bank and watched as she slowly regained her strength. The goose came to understand that she had been looking for mercy in the wrong place and doing so had left her discouraged and depressed. Waiting patiently and praying for a few leftovers had left her often doing without. But in her distress, she had found someone who

cared enough about her to help her thrive. As much as she loved the nourishment, she learned to love the relationship with the boy far more.

The greatest problem among most Christians is that we look in the wrong direction, the wrong place for our nourishment. We believe that if we come to church on Sunday, that is all we need to do to get us through the week. That we can pick up a piece of spiritual food from the Sunday service and that should suffice to keep us from starving spiritually. There's a great danger in that and it truly diminishes our availability for God not only to feed us, but also to use us. We become blind to all the opportunities that God places in our path to nourish our souls and fill our hearts.

The issue for the man at the Pool of Bethesda was not a matter of faith. He believed with all his heart and mind that if he could just make it into the pool before anyone else, then he would be healed.

5 One who was there had been an invalid for thirty-eight years.

6 When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, "Do you want to get well?"

7 "Sir," the invalid replied, "I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me."

It is almost as if he isn't listening to Jesus's question. Jesus asks, "Do you want to get well?" and he answers, "I need help to get into the pool." Jesus asks a yes or no question and the man gives him his solution instead, as if that is the only

possible answer. “Of course, I want to be healed, but I can only do that if someone helps me into the pool.” He is totally blind to any other suggestion, mostly because he has been fixated on this one solution for so many years.

Jesus’ response must have confounded him. Jesus doesn’t say, “Here, let me help you get into the pool.” He doesn’t say, “Hey, I’ve got twelve strong men with me and we can just lift you and carry you to that pool quickly.” No, no, no. He puts the onus right back on the man.

8 Then Jesus said to him, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

“Wait a minute, Jesus, I can’t walk. That’s why I am here. That’s why I have to be the first to get into the pool!”

“Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.”

“Ignore the religious leaders who are telling you that it is the Sabbath, and you are not allowed to carry your mat. Ignore the people rushing to get into the pool first. Open your eyes and see the opportunity standing before you. You can have the very thing that you covet so dearly, just not in the way you expect it.”

For I know the plans I have for you,” declares the Lord, “plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.”

Jeremiah 29:11

Trust in the Lord with all your heart

and lean not on your own understanding;

Proverbs 3:5

“But preacher, I have believed in the pool for all my life! No matter how grateful I am, I am reluctant to rethink this. I have already accepted it the only way. I have given into it. My hope is in the pool. Don’t ask me to give up that hope for something new!”

We feel that way because the act of faith becomes more important than faith itself to us. It is important for us to act on our faith, but only to the extent that our faith is placed where it needs to be, in the hope of salvation through Jesus Christ our Lord, not in our own strength to make it to the pool. We have to get rid of our “What’s the use attitude” of trying to get someone to help us into a pool of false promises when the actual healing and redeeming presence of the Lord is speaking right into our souls. He wants to heal us. He wants to nourish us. He does not want us satisfied with tidbits and leftovers. And he doesn’t want our faith to be misplaced in the promises of the world around us.

I’ve eaten at a few of those very high dollar restaurants run by celebrity chefs. I don’t know if you have ever been. You sit at a table with a white dining cloth, fancy napkins, silver, crystal, snappy waiters and waitresses, and elegance that defies reason. You order a meal that sounds delicious, like baked pheasant with a dark truffle and celery reduction in a caramel glaze. The meal comes with a couple of vegetables and some bread and costs more week’s wages. They tell you it is all about the experience. When the food arrives, there is a forkful of pheasant, a sprig of asparagus, a couple of chopped carrots in a glaze, and a slice of dark bread. And while the food is delicious, you can never walk away

claiming that it has alleviated your hunger or leaves you with any real satisfaction. For the price, I really don't recommend the experience.

God is far more concerned about our hunger and our nourishment than the presentation value. We can gain a more significant spiritual experience in a small country church than the greatest cathedral. We can gain greater satisfaction of healing for our soul by feeding the hungry in our community than being a guest as the house of the richest person in the county. And while I love great organ music and the sound of a magnificent choir, I find more the sound of a child singing in the halls brings a bigger smile to my face.

We can be so reluctant to be grateful for the things we have right in front of us rather than waiting forever for something that may never be. The ways of this world will never bring satisfaction. It will only leave us wanting for more.

But grasping the love and salvation of Jesus Christ, who is standing in front of us, will fill all our needs. He is the living water, the bread of life, the healer of our souls. He is our source of life and our reason for living, and that transcends the walls of this building and even this community.

All we have to do is:

"Take up our bed and walk."

God bless you all!

AMEN

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