

Order of Worship for December 11th, 2011

Prelude

Pre-service Song

Welcome and Announcements

Ministry Moment: Brief announcement from Angel Tree

Call to Worship: Third Sunday in Advent: Jesus Sent from the Father as our Lord and King: Luke 1:26-33

Dedication of Darlene (?) Kampstra, daughter of Wayne and Carol Kampstra, grand-daughter of Richard and Jane Miller.

Special Music: “Hosanna” directed by Darlene Bell, singing “Christmas!”

Songs of Worship:

“Angels, from the Realms of Glory”

Song # 259

“I Extol You”

Song # 248

“O Come, O Come, Emmanuel”

Song # 245

“Sing We Now of Christmas”

Song # 275

Offering

Special Music: Tara Wixom

Message: “Healing the Helpless” (John 5:1-18)
By Pastor Bronson

Closing Song: “Joy to the World!” Song # 270

Parting Word of Grace

All are urged to come to the Congregational Business Meeting
4:00pm in the Sanctuary

Though only members can vote, it is of vital interest to all attendees as well as we elect new officers and adopt the budget for 2012. In addition at this meeting the Elders will be submitting some significant proposals for new directions in ministry for the congregation.

Please Come and Be Part of the Lord’s Good Work!

“The Prayer Closet”

December 11, 2011

“Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving.”

(Colossians 4:2a)

This week let us be united in praying that:

1. **District and Home Office, EFCA:** the National and District offices will remain zealous in the promotion and defense of Biblical truth; they will work effectively for planning and planting new churches; they will oversee and ensure the continued orthodoxy and spiritual vitality of Trinity University and Seminary
2. **President Obama:** the Spirit will bring inner conviction regarding the grace, truth and justice of God; the Lord will guide and correct his administrative oversight and policy decisions; he will enjoy good health and peace within his family
3. **Music Ministry and Sound Room Personnel:** the Spirit will preserve all concerned in good health; all who are performing will have mental and spiritual clarity for their performances; the Lord will bless and be glorified in all that is done!
4. **Military or Public Service Personnel of the Week: E4 Air Force, Tim Hammonds** (son of Tom and Cindy Hammonds): that his transition into civilian life and the civilian work force go smoothly; that he find a good job that will provide for his family in a timely manner; that the Lord make His presence evident in he an Megan’s lives.
5. **Young Adult of the Week: Caleb Sundahl, California State University, Chico** (son of Kirk and Marcia): that he draw closer to God and glorify Him with work

The title for today’s message is “Healing for the Helpless.” It has a subtitle that comes from one of the commentators who calls this a third sign. We talked [before] about whether or not Jesus used the signs as advertisements. The text is John 5:1-18. I would like to begin this morning by reading that text.

“After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. In these lay a multitude of invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had already been there a long time, he said to him, ‘Do you want to be healed?’ 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 going another steps down before me.’ Jesus said to him, ‘Get up, take up your bed, and walk.’ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been healed, ‘It is the Sabbath, and it is not lawful for you to take up your bed.’ But he answered them, ‘The man who healed me, that man said to me, “Take up your bed, and walk.”’ They asked him, ‘Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take up your bed and walk?’ Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place. Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.’ The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had healed him. And this was why the Jews were persecuting Jesus, because he was doing these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, ‘My Father is working until now, and I am working.’”

This account of the healing of the lame man of the Pool of Bethesda offers us a brief and interesting and important look at being healed. We are going to talk about [that]; that is what this message is about, looking at the issue of healing. But recalling where we were last week and the healing of the official’s son from the city of Capernaum, we certainly understand that healing is an important issue and understanding it correctly is important in understanding God and His grace to us. It is always wise for us to remember, of course, whenever we read the Gospel [of John] that there are two levels of communication to us. One is the purpose of John. John’s purpose is that we would come to know, understand and believe that Jesus is in fact the Messiah sent by God. That is what he wants us to do. So whenever we read any portion of the Gospel we should ask ourselves, “What am I learning about Jesus as the Messiah, the Savior of mankind?” Obviously the question that follows is, “Do I get it? Do I receive that? Do I sense that He in fact is blessing me in that way?” At the same time Jesus has a purpose. The purpose of Jesus is at all times to help us understand that God, His Father, is the God of grace and truth. You want to always have those two in the back of your mind: Jesus is the Messiah and God is the God of grace and truth, and I want to be sure I know how to put those together.

When Jesus goes up to Jerusalem, in this case, the important thing about his visit is not what feast it was. Sometimes when He went up [to Jerusalem] it will say He went up at “this” particular feast, and that is very important for understanding what He does thereafter. But this time all it says is that He goes up; it doesn’t tell us what feast it is. Interestingly it doesn’t tell us that He goes to the temple, it is never mentioned. So instead there is something else that is important here. (See question # 1 at end of text) This is what is important on this occasion. The important thing is that Jesus stops by the Pool of Bethesda. The question we should ask is, “Did He just happen by?” You can ask another question – remember we are thinking about Jesus, we are trying to understand the way Jesus operates – do we think Jesus just happened to stop by the well outside of Sychar, and did it just happen that the Samaritan woman came to the well outside of Sychar? I don’t think so. When you think about Jesus, when you think about what we are told regarding Him through the gospels we realize this: Jesus had three, maybe three and a half years to accomplish all that the Father wanted Him to accomplish. Personally I do not think that anything that happened in Jesus’ life happened by chance. So the question that comes to anyone of us I think is, “What about us? Have we ourselves experienced an appointment with Jesus Christ? Have we recognized that Jesus, by His intent, steps into our lives and says, ‘I am here’? When that occurs of course we need to be respondent. So be thoughtful about that as we continue to reflect upon what we have here before us.

I want you to come with Jesus and I want you to go through the Sheep Gate into Jerusalem, and I want your eyes to go over and look at the Pool of Bethesda. Five columned porticos: if you are like me [you imagine] probably marble columns: beautiful. Now I want your eyes to drop down and see the people who are there. What is at the Pool of Bethesda? It was a gathering of the sick, the lame and the broken. Now – I know the Cooks can do this for they have been in the Near East and so can anybody who has been abroad at least twenty years ago – I want you to stand there and I want you to take a deep smell! Jews were cleaner than most people because the stipulations of the Law said they were to do a variety of washings. But nobody as far as we know had any clue about germs and bacteria and stuff like that. So they were not clean in order to be antiseptic, free of disease. The dense mass of the ill and lame wrapped in whatever clothing they could get ahold of was eloquent testimony that these are the people who are sidelined from life, and they are waiting for a miracle. The hope of everyone there was that they might be healed if they could get into the water first: did you get that last word? First. The idea was that the water would be disturbed by an angel. This is what the man said: “*Sir, I have no one to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up, and while I am going another steps down before me.*” Be the man. There is the pool. “I’m going...first.” Thirty eight years.

It is a cruel hope, isn’t it? A cruel hope: it is the kind of hope that our casinos offer people. You can have it all, depending...

Whether this was real, whether it really worked that way or it was just superstition, neither Jesus nor John says. What we are told is that Jesus healed the lame man. This is the second of the healings that we are told about in the Gospel of John, though when you read the other gospels you realize Jesus has performed lots of healings. It is just that it in this gospel John is separating them out. This is why one man says, “I think this is maybe the third sign.” The first sign was changing the water to wine at the wedding of Cana, the second sign was healing the official’s son. The third is that Jesus has found the man who had no one to put him in the pool. That is worth thinking about. My comment is that he is a double loser. Not only can he not get to the water and be healed, but he has got nobody to help him on the way. We should think and reflect upon that and take it into our understanding. Again we should ask, “Is this a sign?” John doesn’t call it a sign. Whether or not Jesus intended it to be such is not clear under the circumstances. Who would even notice this sign? What about the others at the pool? Look at verse 13 in the text. “*Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, as there was a crowd in the place.*” Jesus’ behavior tells me this is not a sign. He does not want anybody to even know who He is. He steps away very quickly.

That raises a question: why did Jesus heal this guy? This is what John tells us: “*Afterward Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, ‘See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you.’*” Here is what I would conclude: Jesus healed this man so he would be healed. That is pretty obvious, isn’t it. There is, however something for us to reflect upon in this. We might conclude that Jesus heals the man so that he will be encouraged to not fall into sin again. In other words there is a relationship between having a healthy body and not sinning. There is a proverb that says this, Proverbs 30:7-9, “*Two things I ask of [God]; deny them not to me before I die: remove far from me falsehood and lying; give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with the food that is needful for me, lest I be full and deny you and say, ‘who is the Lord?’ or lest I be poor and steal and profane the name of my God.*” What do we gather from those comments? According to that Proverb, our circumstances can indeed make us more or less vulnerable to sin. Can we assume that in some sense having a sound body gives one strength to resist sinning? Surely good health increases the possibility, doesn’t it, of honorable work.

You are probably thinking, where are we going with this? Beloved, if we are going to follow our Lord, then we are going to seek what is good for people just so they will be well, just so they will be healthy, just so they will be able to cope with the demands and necessities of life. We are going to recognize that when people are financially

impoverished, when for whatever reason they lack the skills and the education needed in order that they are going to be able to avoid crime and make their own way in the world, then we are going to help them get what they need so that they don't fall in...into what? There is a widespread sentiment amongst evangelical type Christians – not particularly dominant in this congregation – that there is not much point in doing something for someone if it doesn't save them from hell. What do you think? What if what you do helps them to stay out of jail? What if the assistance that is offered enables them to stay off the welfare rolls? What if as a matter of fact by helping these people it turns out that they become the kind of people who create wealth, pay taxes and support the order of the community? Waste of time? Not [in] in my town. I like to be in a town where the citizens are healthy and strong and are able to pay their taxes and support the school system and make certain that the community runs well and has a minimum of crime. I like to live in that kind of community. Indeed, isn't it possible that by helping these people to be healthy and have the means of taking care of their families they can [better] love their spouse and children? They are still going to go to hell, but it is worth it. The romance of misery is a pretty tale until you are the one in it. For all these reasons, investing in the material well-being and moral development of my neighbor seems like a pretty good idea, not least because it looks like what Jesus did at least some of the time. Love seeks what is good even if it can't manage to gain what is best. Wouldn't it be nice if every single person in Oroville was a Christian, walking the path of faith on their way to heaven's gate? Oh, that would be wonderful. But short of that wouldn't it be wonderful if everybody in Oroville lived ordered lives, did not abuse their children, did not abuse substance...O yeah, that would be pretty good too.

At this point in John's narrative, John takes us into Jesus' first major confrontation with the Jews. I just want to introduce you to where we are going to go, probably after the holidays. What we have here is not the first encounter Jesus has with the [Jews]. If you go back and review all of chapters 1 through 5 you realize this is the third discourse, a third body of teaching in which Jesus explains who He is and why He does what He does. You gradually build up an understanding of the nature of God's grace. The first [discourse] was the disclosure regarding the true nature of spiritual life and the need to be born again: John 3. The second of the discourses had to do with what true worship is. That is John 4, in spirit and truth. The third is the one we will pick up when we return from Minnesota. We will pick all this up later on. Keep reading this over so we really know what it is.

Before we return to the issue of healing, I think we are right and wise to appreciate that Jesus is good and kind to people because Jesus is good and kind. You and I want that attribute to be true of us. We want a testimony, I want this body of believers to have a testimony in this community: that is a group of people who are good and kind. I believe that that is eloquent, particularly in the world that we live in in which there are a lot of people who are not good or kind. You want to be reflective about that. [Jesus] is not just advertising the way to heaven; He is just being good and kind, which happens to be the way to heaven, as it were. This parallels the first observation that Jesus heals a person just so they will be healed. This bears directly on the issue of our being witnesses for the Lord. Peter admonishes – you might want to read this (I Peter 2:12). It is important that we grasp this because we want to be like Jesus. We know this; I have spoken of it before: how many people did Jesus heal who never came to a saving faith? Lots! Did it break His heart? I suspect that it did; he was most saddened by that. So you and I, we are going to face the same kind of situation, where we attempt to be good and kind and what is our reward in the world? In your face! But listen to what Peter says, “*Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable...*” (Now notice what it says next.) “...so that when they speak against you as evildoers (But I am good and I am kind!)” “...they may see your good deeds and glorify God...” (When? [It will be] at the end, not the end of the week, [but] at the end.) “...on the day of visitation.” There are two exhortations for us that we have to grasp and put into our understanding and reinforce our will to be good and kind in a world that will spurn good people and kind people. The first is, according to what Peter says, we must concentrate on self-control for the purpose of holiness. The second is we are to keep our conduct honorable. These two things are needful for us if we are to persevere and not be corrupted by the world around us. There are two ways the world corrupts us: at least two!

What happens when you are going to be very good and kind and the “reward” is rejection, scorn, doubt, mockery and suspicion? You feel like “Forget it!” So your own will and resolve to follow after the model of Christ begins to crumble. You can harden your heart against those who are so ungrateful for your goodness and kindness. Soon you are simply a model, a reflection of the hard hearted world around us. That is one form of corruption. The other form of corruption is you begin to play to the crowd. Again you end up like the world. So we need holiness, we need a clear focus on the central purpose of Jesus Christ which is to present God the Father as the God of grace and truth: we don’t compromise. We want to be honorable. We want to be honorable no matter how we are treated. We want to live above the machinations, the devices, the insinuations and the deceptions of the people around us. We want to live above it. We want to live like Christ.

It is extremely important here that Peter does not say that we are to do good in order that we would be seen. What he says is, if we are good, we will be seen. You do appreciate the difference.

Let us go back to the lame man at the Pool of Bethesda. We are told that he had been an invalid for thirty eight years. I stressed that earlier. I hope you have been thinking about that, letting it run through your mind. That is a long time. For thirty eight years that man has been lying there some feet, maybe a yard or two from the pool. Notice that John tells us, *“When Jesus saw him lying there and knew he had already been there a long time...”* The length of time makes a difference. How is it that for thirty eight years you can’t get in the water? That is worth thinking about. Did the man have no family; were there no friends? Had he lain there for thirty eight years and been unable to make a friend out of anybody else that was there? How had he managed to survive? If you’ve been in a particular situation for thirty eight years, you have figured out how to survive! And it might just be that you are content.

You do realize what Jesus asked this guy? “Do you want to be healed?” The question is absurd. How does the man answer Him? “I have no one to help.” When you read the narrative here, notice that Jesus makes no response, no comment regarding the guy’s answer. Jesus does not commiserate; He does not comment on the hardness of heart in those around about him, Jesus does not say a thing about how sad and difficult it must have been [to be] there so long and to have suffered. For you see, the man has given an excuse. He has not said, “I have failed,” he has said, “Nobody has helped me.” It is a remarkable thing to fail at the same thing for thirty eight years.

What I want you to notice (we just covered questions 6 and 7) is what Jesus does. Jesus does not comment on anything; all He does is He says, act like somebody who is well. Do you see that? He says, Thirty eight years? Get up; take up your bed. Move out. BE DONE with sickness! Don’t stay there! Get up; move out. Act like someone who is healed. Do I need to draw applications? Anybody here been nursing a weakness? Living inside an inability? Hiding behind your fear? Stop. Recognize that if you respond in faith, you are already healed.

Personally I think Jesus said this quietly, very privately, looking straight into this man’s eyes. Jesus was not performing for the crowd, nor did He want the lame man to have the crowd on his mind. The man had lived a long time in the midst of that crowd. They hadn’t helped him and they were not likely to help him now. So I think Jesus spoke quietly and firmly. I think that as He looked into the man’s eyes there were two profound truths given to that man, and these are the two that I believe came to him. The first was that Jesus loved him and was able to heal him. The second was, it was his last chance that the time had come, and he had better seize the moment that was offered to him. I ask that question in Questions nine and ten: do we believe that there comes a moment when we can either respond or we don’t?

When Peter and John after Pentecost healed the lame man by the temple, we are told, this is the description of what happened after Peter and John healed a man by the temple: *“...leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and*

praising God, and recognized him...” Isn’t that a great scene? Now go back [to John 5:1-18]. There is no note of praise; there is not even any indication of joy; there is not a word of thanksgiving; do you notice that? The absence of those things simply shouts from the page. The man goes to the temple, for that is where Jesus finds him. When He finds him, this is what He says, “*See, you are well!*” And then He says, “*Don’t sin anymore.*” It is a word of warning. What might happen? “Don’t sin anymore, that nothing worse...” Think about that. How long was the guy by the pool? Thirty eight years! What could be worse? Plenty, plenty could be worse. In Matthew 12:43-45 and Luke 11:24-26 a parable of Jesus told about someone who had a demon cast out of their life. The demon comes back, finds that the soul is empty, he goes and gets seven other demons and the comment is, it was worse then than it had been before. Beloved, it is a very dangerous thing to have an empty soul. So let me ask, do you have an empty soul? Or have you asked that God would fill your soul with His love through the indwelling Holy Spirit as you call upon Him in the name of Jesus? Nothing is worse than going to hell. Nothing.

Please pray with me: gracious Father, all of us are in some sense, of course, like the man beside the pool. Illness, brokenness is such a characteristic part of the lives that we lead. We thank You for Your grace and goodness to us. But Father we know to heal this or that or this or that, is merely an incidental part; that the heart of the matter is the healing of the soul, transformation of the mind, being born again by the Holy Spirit as we confess our personal faith in Jesus Christ and His death for our sin. Therein, Father, there is the healing of the whole man. That is what we desire. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

Questions for Understanding and Application:

1. Have you ever had a divine appointment with God similar to that of the Samaritan woman or the man at the pool of Bethesda?
2. Have you ever felt “sidelined” from life? How do you tend to think and feel about people who appear to be pursuing a fool’s hope instead of taking positive steps to gain what they need?
3. What are some of the “cruel” hopes the world sets in front of people?
4. To what extent in time, personnel and other resources should we as individuals and we as a church seek to improve the general living conditions and moral character of our community?
5. Why can it be hard to sacrifice for what is good when no one can see?
6. Have there been times when you were content to remain unwell? Have you known others regarding whom you wondered if they preferred to not improve or get better?

7. In your experience how do people, perhaps especially Christians, excuse themselves from responsibility for their own situation?

8. Why is it sometimes necessary to act as if you are well even though you don't feel that way?

9. Do you believe there comes a time when a person has no more opportunities?

10. Is it possible that a salvation neglected could end up worse than having never been saved? (See Mtt. 12:43-44 and Luke 11:23-26)