

Sermon for 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Easter May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2013

John 5:1-9

Blessings to you and **peace** from God the Father, our **risen** Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, and the **Holy** Spirit. Amen

**Christ is risen. He is risen indeed. Alleluia.**

The **news** story begins with the headlines: “Pastor Ed Dobson says survival with ALS—Lou Gehrig’s disease—is a mixed blessing; he is sustained by faith and hope”. The story **itself** starts out with the statement: “**Pastor** Ed is on the podium preaching the gospel as **only** he can. Preaching at the *Mars Hill Bible Church*, the mega church formerly pastured by **Rob** Bell in Grandville, Michigan, Mars Hills’ **current** pastor Kent Dobson, listens as his **father** speaks of the **comfort** that **Scripture** and **his wife and family** give him in times of despair.” For you see, in the year 2000 Pastor **Ed** Dobson was diagnosed with ALS, an **incurable** degenerative disease that affects the **nerve** cells in the brain and the **spinal** cord which in time will lead to death.

That morning at the podium Pastor Ed **admits** to the congregation, (quote) “Silently **waiting** on God is a **struggle** and **waiting** on the Lord is a challenge. It is a **lot** easier to say ‘get ready’ than it is to **wait** on the Lord. But this **one** thing I

know: **God** has brought me this far. This **same** God will deal with me **today** and **tomorrow**. I can **rest** in his coming into my life. I **hold fast** to a faith and a hope that comes with **strength**; the strength to **keep** living life, **despite** its challenges, and to **continually** give thanks for the **miracle** and **blessings** I have, even in the **darkest** of times.” (end quote)

Now you may ask, *“Just who is Pastor Ed Dobson?”* When he was diagnosed with ALS he was pastoring *Calvary Church* in Grand Rapids, Michigan which had a **14,000** member congregation. At the time his doctors **reported** to him that he had the disease Ed was told that he had between 2 and 5 years to live. Ed **retired** from Calvary Church in 2005. Still alive **thirteen** years later, his life now has **degenerated** to the place where his arms do **not** work any longer and his wife helps to **feed** and **dress** him. He **continues** to be a man of **deep** faith in God and what God *can and is* doing for him **in spite** of this disease. He is **truly** a man whose life reflects a *strength and belief* in a God who **is with us** no matter **what** this world may bring our way.

Would you say that Ed Dobson’s **life** is an *example of a miracle* given the fact that he has lived **more** than 7 years longer than the doctors expected with a disease which will eventually **deteriorate** his body to point it where he can **no**

longer survive? Which would you say, *miracle or no???* Does it take **faith** for us to realize that a **miracle** has happened?

I **ask** this question because in our **gospel** reading for this morning we heard of an **unnamed** crippled man who was lying waiting by the *Beth-zatha pool* which was just **outside** of the temple walls where the **outcasts** would go to try to find healing in the waters. This man had been ill for **38** years. According to an **old** legend, which in **many** of our bible versions have removed because it was thought to have been added **after** the original text was written—hence there is no verse 4 in our reading, this pool was **supposed** to have had **healing** powers whenever its **waters** were stirred up, **presumably** by an angel. When this **stirring up** would occur the people who were **waiting** at the pool got a chance to get **into** the water so they could be healed. **Also**, according to this legend, the **first one** into the pool after each disturbance would be **cured** of whatever disease he had. It was a wait of **desperation**. So you had to get **wet** to get well according to this legend—**unless** of course like in our lesson for today when **Jesus** observed the man lying there **waiting** and **realized** he had been there a long time Jesus **merely** asked him, “Do you want to be made well?”

In this **particular** miracle this is where the story takes on **sort** of a strange twist. We might **imagine** that hearing Jesus’ question was sort of **odd** because if I

had been ill for 38 years I would **jump** at the chance of being made well. But rather than **directly** answering Jesus' question, the man makes **excuses** as to why he **cannot** be healed—"I have no one to put me in the pool when the water is stirred up, while I am on my way someone else gets ahead of me." There **is no**, "Yes sir, I would love to be healed!" **Just excuses!!!** The man was simply **focusing** on what was right **in front** of him in the **pool** of water and how he could **not** get to it—he **was not** focusing on the **gift** of healing that Jesus was offering him.

Jesus says to him, "*Stand up, take your mat, and walk.*" At **once** the man was made well, he **took** up his mat, and he **walked**. But we hear no great words of thanks, no words of praise to God, no returning to Jesus—as a matter of fact there was no acknowledgement that the man even knew who Jesus was. Jesus had **healed** the man and he **slipped away** into the crowd. For the man who had been ill for **38** years, that day, at that pool, the **real** power was the healing words of God which came through Jesus. The healing was **not** in the stirred up waters because the man never got wet. He **did** get well though. Jesus **healed** him instantaneously. Does it take **faith** for us to realize that a **miracle** has happened? The man seemed to have faith in the power of the water—but the power truly lies with God.

This is a most strange miracle indeed. I feel this question **begs** to be asked, “Just who **was** this unnamed crippled man in our story?” There is not one word of faith in this reading, there is no hint that he believed in Jesus because a **few** verses later in John’s text when the Jews wanted to know who healed him the man said he had no idea who he was. There were no signs he had any faith, he had no humility, he had no gratitude—**nothing**. This man did not deserve to be healed any more than **anyone else** there that day. Yet, **why** do you suppose Jesus singled him out of **all** the rest of the people who were there waiting by the pool for some miracle to heal them? **Why** him? **Why not** someone else?

This is what **I believe** to be the answer which is the **message** of this text. Jesus **healed** this unnamed man **not** because of who the man was but because of who Jesus was and is. This is a story and a message of **God’s** grace, the **undeserved and unmerited** love of God which is available to **each** of us. This is a story of **anyone and everyone**. It is a **radical** idea contained within a **strange** miracle. This is right at the **heart** of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. God comes to us—undeserving as we are.

The man who was **healed** by the Beth-zatha pool was **never** written of again in the bible. In this miracle story, as I said, there was **no** talk of great faith, **no** rejoicing, **no** thanksgiving to God, the crowds are **not** amazed with the goodness of

God. The man just **got up**, **took** his mat, began to **walk** as Jesus told him to do.

Does it take **faith** for us to realize that a **miracle** has happened?

In a **2012** article about “Miracles” it says—today **55%** of Americans are certain they occur. **75%** of responders said they had prayed to God to receive **healing** from an illness or injury and **85%** said they had prayed for **someone else’s** healing. **Miracles**—Pastor Ed Dobson living **beyond** his 2 to 5 year prognosis—a **miracle**? The **unnamed** crippled man at the Beth-zatha pool where Jesus **happened** to be walking by—a **miracle**? Those **blessings** we receive from God which we **never** thought could happen—**miracles**?

Miracles, we **miss** them all the time because we are **caught up** in the *present* moment and this is all we see what is right in front of us—like the crippled man who put his **faith** in what he thought to be the **healing** power of the water. Miracles are **all** about God’s goodness, they are **all** about God’s actions, and they are **all** about a God who loves us. No matter **what** the outcome God is there—God is there with us *in the struggles*. God is with us even when we are **touched** by His grace and we do not **even** realize it. I am so grateful that **everyday** God deals with us according to who God is, and not according to who we are. **Miracles**—seen or unseen, small or large, noticed or unnoticed—they are **all** because of who God is for us His **beloved** children. As **Pastor** Ed Dobson said, “I **hold fast** to a *faith and*

*a hope* that comes with strength; the **strength** to keep living life, **despite** its challenges, and to continually give **thanks** for the **miracle** and **blessings** I have, even in the **darkest** of times.” Even in **our** darkest hours **God** is with us in undeserved *grace, tenderness, and mercy*—that **too** is a miracle from God who loves us. All thanks be to God. AMEN.