



LESSONS IN LIVING

“Recovering from Spiritual Amnesia”

A St. Andrew's Sermon
Delivered by Dr. Stephanie Hawley
July 27, 2025

Scripture Readings: *(The Inclusive Bible)*

John 5:1-15

Some time after this, there was a Jewish festival and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate, there is a pool with five porticoes; its Hebrew name is Bethesda. The place was crowded with sick people—those who were blind, lame or paralyzed—lying there waiting for the water to move. An angel of God would come down to the pool from time to time, to stir up the water; the first one to step into the water after it had been stirred up would be completely healed. One person there had been sick for thirty-eight years. Jesus, who knew this person had been sick for a long time, said, “Do you want to be healed?” “Rabbi,” the sick one answered, “I don’t have anyone to put me into the pool once the water has been stirred up. By the time I get there, someone else has gone in ahead of me.” Jesus replied, “Stand up! Pick up your mat and walk.” The individual was immediately healed, and picked up the mat and walked away.

This happened on a Sabbath. Consequently, some of the Temple authorities said to the one who had been healed, “It’s the Sabbath! You’re not allowed to carry that mat around!” The healed one explained, “But the person who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” They asked, “Who is this who told you to pick up your mat and walk?” The healed person had no idea who it was, since Jesus had disappeared into the crowd that filled the place. Later on, Jesus met the individual in the Temple and said, “Remember, now, you’ve been healed. Give up your sins so that something worse won’t overtake you.” The healed one went off and informed the Temple authorities that Jesus was the one who had performed the healing.

Isaiah 43: 18-19

Thus says the Holy One: “Forget the events of the past, ignore the things of long ago! Look, I am doing something new! Now it springs forth—can’t you see it? I’m making a road in the desert and setting rivers to flow in the wasteland.

Sermon

Good morning, St. Andrews. Good morning. It is still morning, right? Okay. It is always a delight to be here with you all. This morning, we're going to spend a little time talking about spiritual amnesia.

I love these two scriptures because they give us hope. They give us hope in a time when many of us feel like we should be in despair. I'm grateful that we have a faith that connects us to hope. We have evidence of hope.

Today, we're going to spend a little time walking through both of these scriptures. The scripture with the person by the healing springs, in particular, reminds me of a conversation I had with my dad many, many years ago. My late father was a pretty centered guy, and he helped me a lot of times by being silent and reflective.

As you can imagine, there's always workplace drama, and I was in the middle of a lot of workplace drama for whatever reason or another about 15 or 20 years ago. In order to keep my friendships intact, I wouldn't vent to my friends, but I could always call my mother, who was retired. She loved it all...every bit of it. She remembered people's names that I had forgotten. I was always right, and I was always the hero. I enjoyed talking to Mom. We didn't talk about it all the time, but every now and again, she'd ask me, "What happened to that man who said or did this?"

It was a lot of fun talking to Mama, but as her health started to decline, when I was in despair, I'd sometimes call my dad. My dad would just listen, and he would ask me, "So what did you do?" or, "So what did you say?" and I felt like I was on trial. But he would ask these reflective questions. The last time I talked to my father about workplace drama (it was the very last time), I gave him some long saga. I can't even remember what it was. Probably tear-laced and everything else. He said, "Did you take it to the good Lord?" This was his way of talking about taking things to prayer and reflection.

That's the way he asked me, and I thought I wasn't sure if I had or not, but the answer should be yes. I said, "Well, yes, yes, of course, of course." Then he said, "That's funny." He said, "You took this issue to God, then you went back and got it, and now you're bringing it to me, and we got to talk about it."

That was my last step. I was stuck, right? I was stuck in my own drama, in my own self-pity. My dad had just a beautiful way of bringing me to understand that I wasn't stuck and that I was connected to something far greater. As we enter the scripture today, we see, of course, this person by the pool and giving Jesus this story. Our scripture says Jesus already knew that this person had been by this pool for 38 years, just waiting for someone to take them into the water.

Jesus listens carefully, doesn't do a lot of talking, and asks a very powerful question: "Do you want to be healthy? Do you want to be whole? Do you want to be well?"

A lot of times we can get so addicted to our problem that when we're addicted to our problem, we just stay in that problem. We look for reasons to be in despair sometimes. Jesus asked that powerful question to check in; to make sure that person has some belief that he can possibly work with. So once the man says, "Yes, I do want to be whole. I do want to be whole," Jesus says, "Stand up. Pick up your mat and walk."

Now, just to let you know, a mat in scripture symbolizes a new life. So Jesus is basically giving this person the opportunity for new life. Of course, when this person goes to talk to the...I always call them "the religionists," the people with all the rules about what's holy, what's not, instead of them celebrating and rejoicing that this person who had some affliction that's never named...instead of them being excited, they want to know who is violating the law on the Sabbath. This is the religion that many people were connected to. It was about rules and regulations. This man goes back to the temple, and of course, Jesus finds him there and says, So you're still walking? Everything's still good.

Then Jesus said a curious thing, and this is something I wrestled with for a while. Jesus, who was so kind, listening, and patient said, "Stop sinning." To me, that was very jarring. I said, *Is this the same Jesus? It feels like two different people.*

I found out it's because of my interpretation and the way I've grown up and been taught the word *sin*. Usually, we think about sin as murder or adultery. We call them the "hot sins," like lust.

I thought, *This man has been here for 38 years. I don't think this person had time for all these hot sins. I just don't.* As I came to understand over the years, *sin* is not just what I was taught in Sunday school as a child in traditional sense. *Sin* is any time that we choose to disconnect from our internal spiritual life. Anytime we have thoughts, and Jesus speaks about this throughout the Gospels, the disconnection of the heart, it's about a spirit and an attitude. He's literally telling this person, "Your attitude—your spirit—is not in spiritual alignment. If you want to stay whole, you have to get into spiritual alignment."

It took me years before I could really understand why Jesus would say this, because it is so important for us to understand that if we continue to give our attention to things that are going on in the world, we will consistently and constantly be in despair.

Probably many of us in this room today have been on our social media feeds or have had some mass media and some broadcast media in our ears this morning. Those things that we attune ourselves to and we pay attention to tend to get into us. They get into our belief system.

This person that's sitting by the pool has been told that if they can just get into that water, they can be healed. We have learned in our country, and probably globally, that whatever is going on in the world determines how we are to feel. I can ask people how they feel or how they're doing, and they'll start telling me about something the government is doing, and that determines how they feel. Or I can ask them a question, and they can start telling me what maybe even our local government or their neighbor did...many times a negative thing. Now, that determines how they feel.

When we're spiritually connected, the external doesn't determine the internal. Often we wind up with addictions...food addictions, substance abuse...and that's because we are seeking wholeness in some way. Often, we ostracize people that are hooked on this drug or have some problem or addiction, but all of us, as human beings, are wired for connection. What we don't know is that we're seeking that spiritual alignment.

I sometimes say that Jesus is a spiritual chiropractor. You're trying to get aligned, but you don't necessarily know that's what you're trying to do. Sometimes we, as spiritual seekers, will hop from church to church or from religion to religion...Baptist today, Buddhist tomorrow, Hindu...seeking something that's external. Anytime we turn our attention to the external, whether it be our mother, our father, our religion, when we start to worship and idolize and give attention, that determines how we feel and what our attitude is, we know that we have spiritual amnesia. Jesus realized that this person, by the pool for 38 years, had spiritual amnesia. Jesus knew that this person had power within, and Jesus tapped into that power.

When you think about it seriously, Jesus could have denied healing to this person, never touched them. Jesus, we know, performed miracles by touching and not touching, but because Jesus had that belief and knew the truth, indeed, that person had the power within them.

As we think about our daily lives, what are we in tune with? Are we internally focused? Are we externally focused? Then we have to figure out how have we have slipped into spiritual amnesia.

I don't know about you, but I slip into spiritual amnesia daily and hourly sometimes. It's very easy because there are so many things in the world that are enticing. We sometimes can figure out we're in spiritual amnesia when we are feeling some despair, when we're feeling judgmental toward other people, when we're into our perfectionism.

These days, sometimes, some people consider it almost a badge: "Well, I'm a perfectionist." That's not anything to be proud of. No, no, no. Because in order to be a perfectionist, you have to judge yourself. And guess what? When you judge yourself, you're probably judging other people. That's spiritual amnesia. We expect people to carry us into the healing waters whenever we're feeling entitled. *How dare they? How dare they do this to me? Well, I'm entitled to this.* That's when we know we've got spiritual amnesia.

When we start looking to politicians or religious leaders, we're looking for a messenger. Make it right, make it whole. These days we're all, quite frankly, staring at our televisions and screens and we're looking for someone to fix it. *Where are the Democrats?* We've heard this forever. *Where are the libertarians?* Everyone's looking externally.

The Egyptians used to have a belief in their religious philosophy that whatever you see in the world is a mirror of the consciousness of the individuals and the people in the world. In our culture, we see just the flip. We are projecting something into the world individually and collectively, and we're seeing something we don't want to see. The Hindus call all of this *Maya*. It's all an illusion, and it's something that keeps all of us for understanding that we are a part of the ground of being. We are, as Jesus told us, God's. You are. We are a part of the whole.

So as we think about this world that we live in, where are we putting most of our attention? Where is our belief? Is our belief in messengers, politicians, or leaders? Because if that's the case, what we see is what we have created in our conscience.

So how do we recover from this spiritual amnesia that we float in and out of from time to time? Because we can't stay stuck here. We see what we've created, and we know that we can't stay stuck. We cannot be in despair. We can't say that we're followers of Jesus and of Jesus's teachings if we're in despair because we're supposed to be the light of the world. If we're in despair as the light of the world, the world is in trouble.

It is difficult sometimes to be a light in the current situation. Where do we get our recovery...our reconnection? There are a lot of ways. Just today, there's music. Music itself is one way to connect, to reconnect, and to recover your spiritual connection to the world.

One of the easiest ones is stillness in nature. There are so many lessons in just walking outside, in the stillness in nature, in not trying to conquer. I love gardening, but not trying to pull weeds. Just being still in nature and leaving my phone in the house and not taking pictures of the purple flowers, because that's my tendency. I go on a nature walk, and then I'm taking pictures, and then...I'm scrolling [laughter]. So, keep in mind that nature is one of the best ways to start restoration and to take us away from all the distractions. There are incredible numbers of distractions, so spiritual amnesia is very easy.

Then the other one that I find incredibly powerful is exemplified today in our scripture. Good, grounded, conscious spiritual leaders point us back inside to ourselves. I always say, you know a good spiritual leader when you see one because of the fruit, not the size of the congregation, not the teleministry, not how many people are driving Cadillacs [laughter]... How many people are reflective, internal, and are serving the world?

If you are with a grounded God-conscious leader, there is service going on under that leadership. There is service rather than ego jockeying. Some of our religions have gotten unhealthy. We have all these hierarchies...who wears certain hats, who wears a certain collar, there are tassels everywhere, and we don't know what's going on.

There's religion that is focused on the ego, and then there is religion that is focused on the heart and knowing that we are divine. When you are under a grounded, conscious leader, you know you're divine because that person reminds you that you are divine. One of the most powerful things that conscious, grounded leaders do is make sure that they are discipling people who go and help other people to know they are divine.

That is how Christianity becomes this beautiful, joyful contagion. That's not conquering. That is a contagion that we are to be. If you're under a grounded God-conscious leader, that leader makes sure we all know what our purpose is. We are divine. No matter what anybody else says, we are divine.

One of the other ways is to belong to a God-conscious community. It could be a church or an organization, but it's a group of people who understand that they are divine, that they are

connected to a higher power, and that their purpose is not to amass more money or things. Their purpose is to make the world a better space, feed the poor, and do justice.

Many times, if we stay out in nature, we'll get our directions about what action to take. If we stay out in nature and we get still, we know where we need to connect. But a good God-conscious, spiritually conscious community can save us from our spiritual amnesia. Here at St. Andrew's, we have many ministries that allow us to serve. We serve so we know we don't have to be in despair.

Our second scripture today from Isaiah says, "The Holy One is doing a new thing." The Holy One is always doing a new thing. If we're attuned and we're not in our spiritual amnesia, we know a new thing is happening, so we have hope. We are not in despair because we know we are connected to the Holy One.

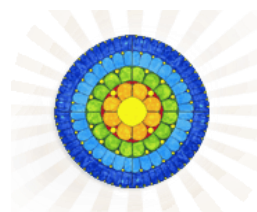
As we leave today, St. Andrew's, I want you to consider what it is you're doing to light up the world and to bring yourself out of spiritual amnesia, regardless of what you're scrolling. Please know that you are doing a new thing, too, and the Holy One is doing a new thing through you.

Benediction

Rev. Babs Miller

Each of you is a child of that wonderful spirit of love that we sometimes call God. That spirit knows when you skin your knee or your heart. That spirit knows when you admire a butterfly or cry in the darkness. So go out into this wonderful creation and tell the whole world that they are loved just exactly as they are. Go and kiss the hurts. Go and laugh and play in the fields of grace and love. Go in peace. Amen.

Transcribed and edited by a member of the St. Andrew's Sermon Transcription Project.



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