

# "Amazing Meets Pathetic"

Text: John 5:1-9

God grant to each of us not only the gifts of grace, mercy, and peace, but an ongoing understanding of and appreciation for those incredible blessings. Amen.

Dear Fellow Christians:

If I just say the word "pathetic," what is your immediate, initial reaction? In other words, is it positive or negative? If you hear that something is pathetic, does it make you want to give it a big hug and protect and provide for it, or does it conjure up feelings of revulsion and loathing?

Depends, right? "Pathetic" can be either. It can be the poor, well-meaning, hard-working soul who just seems to be met by one disaster after another – none of which seem to be the result of his or her own foolishness. That's the kind of pathetic that compassionate folk want to comfort and protect.

But there's another sort of "pathetic" that routinely elicits almost the opposite response, even from those whose hearts bleed for the down and out. This is the sort of pathetic seen in the ungrateful slob who has it all, but appreciates nothing. Or the mom who torments and injures the children that she should naturally want to protect and nurture. It's what we see in those folks who seem bound and determined to destroy their own lives through a never-ending series of horrible decisions, or who wrap themselves in a cloak of self-pity because life doesn't seem to be giving them everything they want and therefore, at least in their own minds, deserve. For that sort of pathetic we tend to have little pity.

You decide which we encounter in our text for this morning. That text is God's Word recorded in John's Gospel, the 5<sup>th</sup> Chapter:

<sup>ESV</sup> **John 5:1-9** *After this there was a feast of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. <sup>2</sup> ¶ Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades. <sup>3</sup> In these lay a multitude of invalids--blind, lame, and paralyzed. <sup>4</sup> <sup>5</sup> One man was there who had been an invalid for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup> 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?" <sup>7</sup> 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." <sup>8</sup> Jesus said to him, "Get up, take up*

*your bed, and walk." <sup>9</sup> ¶ And at once the man was healed, and he took up his bed and walked. Now that day was the Sabbath.*

These are God's words. They are therefore perfect, from first to last. How pathetic it would be for us, once we come to recognize the source and value of these words, to ignore what they teach. On the contrary, that our God would richly bless us through the study of his perfect words this morning, so we pray, "**Sanctify us by the truth, O Lord. Your word is truth!**" Amen.

Most of us would think of the poor, afflicted soul in our text for this morning as the lovable kind of pathetic. There is just something in us that wants to help folks like this. We find ourselves wishing we could have been there for him – scooping him up when the waters of the pool were stirred and helping him in so that he might be relieved of his seemingly interminable suffering. We would probably feel even more strongly if we could see the poor wretch with our own eyes – witness his misery and ongoing suffering.

Only that's indicative of part of the problem here, isn't it? We are guided, *driven*, much more powerfully by what we see and *experience* than we are moved by what we simply *know*. How it would break our hearts to see the poor man desperately struggle, year after year, to be the first into the pool, only to see him fail, year after year. I have no doubt that every single man, woman, and child here today would gladly, eagerly, try to help in any way we could. I could see us all pooling our time and energy to have someone sit with him, night and day – for an entire year if need be – to make sure he would make it into the pool and be healed. And we would be filled with joy and a sense of profound satisfaction and accomplishment if we succeeded.

But how do you explain the fact that we typically feel no such empathy for those that God himself sees as pathetic? How is it that we tend to feel little or no compassion for those who do not know and believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, those whose feet are therefore not on the path to eternal life?

Part of the answer is that we are indeed guided most powerfully by what we can actually see and verify with our eyes. Those who are living in unbelief often appear to be anything but needy. In fact they often appear to have it all. They often seem healthy, successful, satisfied, and content. They don't *look* like they need our help, but they do.

That's exactly why Jesus didn't make his Great Commission to the Christian Church something like, "Go and help the poor and sick of every nation, feeding and clothing them." He said, "**Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you.**" The difference is that we don't tend to see what God sees. We don't notice what God notices. We don't recognize pathetic as God recognizes it.

Dictionaries define "pathetic" as "*miserably inadequate*." In the case of unbelief, God sees every single human being – apart from Jesus Christ – as just that: miserably inadequate. Not only is every human being sinful, they have neither the power nor the means to correct their own problem. In fact, unlike the man lying year after year near the Pool of Bethesda, human beings naturally experience no desire to be healed. Unbelievers are dead in trespasses and sins, which means they don't have any idea there is even a problem. They may have a vague notion that "*all is not right with the man upstairs*," but it typically goes no farther than that. They certainly can't fix the problem on their own, even if their conscience told them all was not well.

What was it, by the way, with that Pool of Bethesda? Interestingly enough some manuscripts of John's Gospel in existence today contain or include a verse 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.**" Some believe that that verse was actually a note added by a scribe as he copied the original manuscript. The thought is that the scribe intended only to try to explain why all those folks were sitting around the pool, and that his note was later mistakenly copied as part of the original. Some are disturbed to learn that such "discrepancies" or "variants" even exist. We shouldn't be. While copyists did make errors, not a single doctrine of Scripture is ever called into question. God himself saw to that – miraculously so. In other words, nothing that we teach or believe is ever called into question by a variant reading. Not one.

What that means specifically in connection with our text is that we shouldn't stubbornly insist that the Bible teaches that an angel would come down and stir the waters of the pool, and that the first one in would always be healed. What we *can* say is that that is what the sick and disabled evidently believed, and that that is why they were there.

The man in our text clearly believed it to be true, since when Jesus asked him, "**Do you want to be made well?**" the sick man answered Him, "**Sir,**

***I have no man to put me into the pool when the water is stirred up; but while I am coming, another steps down before me.***" The man obviously believed in the amazing powers of the pool to heal.

Not to be too hard on the guy, but that was a pathetic answer – in every conceivable way. It was pathetic in that it makes our hearts fairly ache in sympathy for him. As far as we know he may have been trying to be first into that pool without success for 38 years. More to the point this morning is the fact that he gave such an answer to the God-man Jesus, the Creator and Savior of the world. This is the first example in this account where Amazing meets the pathetic. The crippled man was standing in the presence of God, and Jesus was offering him healing. Yet the question caused the man to look not to Christ as the provider, but to his own struggle to gain what he wanted.

This account is actually therefore a microcosm of exactly how every single human being naturally approaches both his God and his own hope for salvation. Man is always most comfortable relying on his own efforts – even in the face of repeated, perfectly consistent failure. On our own, we know no other way, even though the way we naturally keep trying ends always and only in failure. Having never once succeeded, the man in our text was evidently perfectly content to keep trying the same thing. Why? Because he knew of no other way. Even when Jesus himself stood before him and offered him another way, he hadn't the faintest idea that Jesus was referring to anything other than the pool and the man's own feeble, fruitless efforts.

That is exactly how pathetic every human being is apart from Jesus Christ – pathetic in the dictionary definition sense of "*miserably inadequate*." God sees man's futile attempt to pay for his own sins and thereby make himself worthy of God's love as pathetic, as "*miserably inadequate*." And this is anything but the lovable sort of pathetic. This is the loathsome variety that God will sentence to the fires of hell on Judgment Day. All who imagine that they are or were good enough all on their own to earn heaven will be condemned without mercy. All such are represented by the cripple in our text who struggled in vain for 38 years to supply his own cure.

The good news here is not only that Jesus cured the poor wretch in our text, but that Jesus cured every poor pathetic wretch in this building today. Think of the joy of that man when Jesus finally cured him. Think of the weight that was lifted and how his spirit must have soared. That's our joy, only on a much deeper, more profound level. Yet to truly appreciate what we have been given we need to first come to terms

with just how pathetic we were, and would be again, without Jesus Christ. What we could never accomplish, Jesus did for us – all on his own. On the cross he provided the goodness that paid for our sins – every single one of them. You and I are forgiven, healed, declared to be righteous and sinless by God the Father himself. That declaration he confirmed by raising Jesus from the dead on Easter morning – God the Father's eternal, immutable declaration that the sum total of all sins has been paid in full. We who were once utterly pathetic in his sight have now been transformed into his holy children. Pathetic, meet amazing.

Yet our text leaves us with a subtle warning that you may have missed, one last hint of pathetic: **And that day was the Sabbath.** You may recall how the scribes and Pharisees, Jesus' enemies, would latch onto this one fact to the exclusion of all others. They would ignore the fact that an amazing miracle had obviously been preformed. They would miss completely the fact that this incident exactly paralleled their own futile struggle to earn heaven themselves. They would stubbornly push from their minds the irrefutable evidence that Jesus was immeasurably more than the fraud that they had made him out to be. All this they would ignore and instead focus on the fact that this astonishing miracle had been performed on the Sabbath, which in their minds was a violation of the Law.

Understand not only how pathetic their animosity was, but that that same evil still resides in your own old Adam, your own sinful flesh. Jesus underscored the ongoing danger every Christian faces when later he sought out the man that he had healed and said to him, **"See, you are well! Sin no more, that nothing worse may happen to you."** The **"worse"** thing of course would have been dying in unbelief. Know then that living in sin carries the terrible power to destroy that astounding miracle that has been performed also in you. The Holy Spirit performed in you an incredible miracle when he brought you to faith in Jesus Christ. You now trust that your debt for sin has been paid, but sin still carries the terrible power to destroy the faith, the miracle, that God has created in you. How tragic it would be to allow sin to again destroy God's holy work and to return us again to our former state, which was simply pathetic.

Abandon then self and sin, and walk instead in the pure joy of the holy perfection that is yours as a child of God. And don't forget to thank your Lord every single day for the ongoing miracle of your own personal faith. Amen.

## Scripture Readings

ESV **Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23** And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, <sup>11</sup> having the glory of God. Her light was like a most precious stone, like a jasper stone, clear as crystal. <sup>12</sup> Also she had a great and high wall with twelve gates, and twelve angels at the gates, and names written on them, which are *the names* of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel: <sup>13</sup> three gates on the east, three gates on the north, three gates on the south, and three gates on the west. <sup>14</sup> Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. <sup>22</sup> ¶ But I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. <sup>23</sup> The city had no need of the sun or of the moon to shine in it, for the glory of God illuminated it. The Lamb *is* its light.

ESV **Acts 16:9-15** And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup> Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them. <sup>11</sup> ¶ Therefore, sailing from Troas, we ran a straight course to Samothrace, and the next *day* came to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup> and from there to Philippi, which is the foremost city of that part of Macedonia, a colony. And we were staying in that city for some days. <sup>13</sup> And on the Sabbath day we went out of the city to the riverside, where prayer was customarily made; and we sat down and spoke to the women who met *there*. <sup>14</sup> Now a certain woman named Lydia heard *us*. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. <sup>15</sup> And when she and her household were baptized, she begged *us*, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay." So she persuaded us.

# ST. PAUL EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

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**The Fifth Sunday after Easter – May 1, 2016**

## The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

## The Opening Hymn – 7 (Red Hymnal)

"As We Begin Another Week"

## The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**The First Lesson:** (Revelation 21:10-14, 22-23) Heaven is again the subject of our reading from the Book of Revelation. We want to focus not so much on the literal pictures that John saw and recorded, but on the fact that heaven will be glorious beyond our wildest dreams – beyond man's ability to imagine. All is a gift from our Savior. Rejoice in the inheritance that is yours through faith in Jesus Christ.

## The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 23 (Page 36)

**The Second Lesson:** (Acts 16:9-15) Paul had the benefit of miraculous visions to guide him in his missionary travels. Though we do not have such visions today, we do have the same powerful Word of God, which is every bit as amazing today as it was in Paul's day. Still today that Word is reaching out with the power of God himself to those who do not yet know their Savior Jesus. Satan therefore knows that the best way to neutralize the power of God's Word is to convince us not to share it.

## The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed – page 15. (Brown Hymnal)

## The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 206 (Verses 1-4) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense"

## The Sermon – Text: John 5:1-9 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

**"Amazing Meets Pathetic"**

## The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

## The Post Sermon Hymn -206 (Verses 5-7, 10) (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus Christ, My Sure Defense"

## The Offering followed by the Prayers

## The Benediction

## The Closing Hymn -52 (Red Hymnal)

"Almighty Father Bless the Word"

## Silent Prayer

**Welcome!** - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

## Attendance - Sunday (40) Ave (46)

### This Week at St. Paul:

<b>Today</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday Worship Service
	<b>-11:15 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Meal
	<b>-12:00 p.m.</b>	– Voters and WF Meetings
<b>Monday</b>	<b>-5:00 p.m.</b>	– New Organ Scheduled to Arrive
<b>Tuesday</b>	<b>-8:00 a.m.</b>	– Organ Installation
<b>Wednesday</b>	<b>-7:00 p.m.</b>	– Midweek Bible Study
<b>Next Sunday</b>	<b>-9:00 a.m.</b>	– Sunday School and Bible Class
	<b>-10:00 a.m.</b>	– Confirmation Sunday w/Communion
	<b>-11:30 a.m.</b>	– Fellowship Meal

**CLC News** – Pastor David Pfeiffer is considering the call to Holy Trinity of West Columbia, SC. Pastor Luke Bernthal has returned the call to Immanuel of Mankato, MN. Messiah of Eau Claire has called graduate Andrew Roehl to teach grades 2-3. Seminary graduate Joe Naumann has returned the call to Living Savior of Eden Prairie. Seminary graduate Ben Libby has accepted the call to Ascension of Tacoma, WA. Teacher Neil Bernthal has returned the call to Gethsemane School of Spokane, WA.

**Gift for Retiring Faculty** – After many years of faithful service, Professor John Pfeiffer is retiring from Immanuel College at the end of the current school year. As is our custom, a thank-offering is being collected. Please mark any contributions to this fund as "Pfeiffer Gift."

**Looking Ahead** – Both the Voters' Assembly and the Women's Fellowship are scheduled to meet this morning after the fellowship meal. Next Sunday, May 8, is Confirmation Sunday here at St Paul, and a fellowship meal is also being planned for that event.

**Voting Application** – Mark Redlin has applied for voting membership.

**Organ Update** – The organ is scheduled to arrive tomorrow afternoon or evening, with installation to begin as soon as possible thereafter. Mr. Hay is bringing an experienced installer with him, so they will need only a volunteer or two to help unload the instrument and to move the old one.