

Easter VI Year C 2025

By Pentecost you will all be Johannine scholars! We've been reading from John's Gospel for the past eight weeks now. By now you know that John's Gospel is radically different from the Synoptic Gospels, Matthew, Mark, and Luke, in style and in content. John is about the meaning and purpose of Jesus's life and ministry; who Jesus is; as contrasted with the Synoptic writers' purpose which is to describe what Jesus does; two different approaches to a theological awareness concerning Jesus of Nazareth. You also know that John claims that Jesus is divine, of the same 'personhood' of God; whereas the Synoptic writers never make that claim. For them Jesus is one more figure in a long line of chosen ones who are sent by God to restore the well-being and dignity of God's beloved people. Moreover, John's claim of Christ's divinity also extends to the people who follow in his way; who live in to their true humanity. In other words, to be truly human is to share in the life of God. In the Gospel of John incarnation is as much about us, as it is about the person of Jesus. We are, as Ray Pickett puts it, "a colony of angels." John fleshes out his theology using high metaphor; I am the vine, I am bread, I am the doorway, I am come down from heaven... and of course those metaphors apply to us as well. Over its history, alas, the church has had a hard time owning such an awareness.

John employs the categories of erudite philosophy, verging on the poetic to make the astounding argument that God is not other, but that God is among us; inhabiting our very souls. John is the latest of the Gospels to be written; and over the past hundred years of scholarship, experts on John's Gospel have argued that John was not written by one writer; rather, it was a collaborative effort over a number of years involving no small

amount of editing and revision. Clearly there is one writer who sets the theme and tone of this Gospel, but there are interruptions in the style and narrative flow, literary breaks into which other writers have appended their points of view. Some scholars argue that this Gospel wasn't finally completed until well into the second century C.E. approaching a hundred years after Jesus's life and ministry.

Today's reading is one of those passages in John that tips us off that this Gospel has more than one author.... Here the narrative breaks from the poetic language of the first four chapters, and the action becomes concise, staccato... very much unlike the prologue just a few chapters before wherein the language is lyrical and high minded... full of theological and philosophical premise... language that has the echo of a mystical experience.... "In the beginning was the word, and the word was with God and the word was God" pure poetry... but here in the first few lines of the fifth chapter... the language is strictly business... narrative action... much like the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark and Luke.... Some editor, perhaps, was uncomfortable with this Gospel's philosophical reverie, and wanted some action.... Perhaps to make this Gospel more attractive, more marketable.... Something Jesus does that might draw the hearer into practical considerations as to what John's philosophy means, and how it might be lived out. Here the author is painting a quite extraordinary picture in just a few terse lines... a picture of a day in the life of Jesus.... Such narrative action is sparse in John.... So we are compelled to pay attention when these so-called miracle stories appear. These day-in-the-life stories inserted into a philosophical treatise. This passage, though action, still bears great theological and philosophical import as well.... It is as if the editor is saying

to us... O.K., you've heard the prologue... now this is what such theology looks like on the ground. If we humans are creatures who bear God's life... here's what that looks like.

So let's look at the scene, a scene of stark, yet marvelously colorful contrast. We look in on Jesus and his disciples going to a Jewish festival in Jerusalem... Now the Jews have all kinds of festivals... but the principal ones happened in Jerusalem... and they were lavish according to the historian Josephus.... People would be cooking along the streets...there would be bells ringing, drums and tambourines keeping rhythm... loud singing and raucous dancing...the city would be packed... no room in the streets or on rooftops... wine and beer flowing (yes, they had beer)... the smell of spices and herbs in the air... the electric thrill of human community... the critical mass of Spirit.

But in stark contrast to the ecstasy of festival in just a brief turn of view in these few lines... we come upon a sordid scene... another world... we come to the Bethzatha pool, which was one of several hot bubbling mineral pools around Jerusalem... a pool thought to have healing qualities.... The legend of the pool was that an angel would come on certain occasions and cause the waters to stir... and the first one to enter the pool would be instantly healed... there are invalids, blind, lame, paralyzed, sick... the least, the outcast... packed in, all around we are told... as crowded as the festival... filling all five niches surrounding the pool.... They are outcasts because illness and disability renders one unclean in ancient Semitic culture... the hurt of the world there gathered, in contrast to the able bodied revelers participating in the festival... and then we are told that there is one at this biblical healthcare facility who has been coming to the pool, waiting, for thirty eight years to be healed... now we've all had to wait at a doctor's

office, but this has got to be the Guinness record... this man for thirty eight years, healing just out of reach.... And, to make matters worse, this facility is also under staffed... there is no one to help him into the pool... the system ain't working... and then Jesus who doesn't ask the man about his faith...the man probably had no idea who this Jesus was... Jesus does not ask for his papers, or an insurance card... Jesus now the proverbial angel roiling the waters... and Jesus tells him to stand, and he is healed... and the man stands up.... The Greek is unmistakable; the word for stand up is the same word for resurrection.... So a resurrection appearance here... the man enabled after thirty eight years to stand with new found dignity... this narrative will go on to tell us...but not in today's reading, that Jesus will bump into this man in the Temple, whole and well... the Temple a place he could not have gone had he been ill... lo, for some thirty eight years... now whole and healed... raised into new life, abundant new life that is restored community.... This is a "the last shall come first" story... that God loves us all, but the ones who cause God to get up in the morning... are the last and the least... the ones who suffer indignity... and indignity, God will not tolerate.... Dignity is to stand welcomed and loved and whole.

Dear sisters and brothers, there is a question we must keep forever upon our lips: Who are *our* last... who are *our* lost... who are the ones who languish amid the indignities of our world, in contrast to the world's abundance.... The two are so far apart... that is a question we Christian folk must ask.... For far too long the church has offered answers only.... Answers pertaining to our own self-interest, our own salvation.... But sisters and brothers, salvation is first about our neighbor. I say we must

ask the question of our neighbor.... Do you want to be made well?... Do you want to be whole? ...Do you want to be welcomed? ...Do you wish to stand as equal? Who are these among us? Who are the unclean of our world? Who are the ones that forever have had to let others go before them? ...The poor... people of color... women... the landless native American...the homeless mother... the addict on the streets... the sick with no access to healthcare... the undocumented immigrant... the Palestinian refugee.... It's a long list... and alas, these days, getting longer... but these are the ones to whom we are given. We are the angels who roil the waters of healing.

Good people of God it is we now who are the raised Christ, we the ones who bear this festival life.... It is for us to stir the waters of healing for our world that languishes for lack of simple human care, for lack of being claimed worthy... no one to put them in the pool, as it were.... We are heirs of the sacred tradition... that God claims all for the joy of community; the place where we recognize our own dignity, and the dignity of our neighbor... and it is our joy to find the lost, to find them walking freely in God's house...restored to dignity... and it has been such a long wait... but now in the life of Christ, in the light of the raised one... the wait is over.... God has made all days Sabbath... all days holy... all days of healing... all festival... no more thirty-eight years... no more waiting... only festival... only the joy of belonging... and the time is God's time.... And that time is always now.