

“What Would Jesus Do?”
Sixth Sunday of Easter: May 5, 2013
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“What Would Jesus Do?” That question is asked as a prelude to decision making about what we should do? Of course, in any situation it is only a guess of what Jesus would do. But, it can be an educated guess because we know what Jesus did. The four gospel narratives are filled with stories of what Jesus did thereby making it easier for us to follow our Lord’s invitation to “Follow me.” However, I would not advise mindless mimicry of what Jesus did.

First of all, you might find it very difficult to walk on water or to feed 5000 with a few loaves and fish. As I said earlier, the answer to “what would Jesus do” calls for an educated guess. One needs to understand what it is our Lord would have us do before running off and doing it. Sometimes the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. Today’s Gospel is a good example of the need to find the deeper meaning when looking at what Jesus did.

The healing of the man at Bethesda is a terrifically clumsy and inept miracle. Let me pick it apart for you. The Gospel tells us that Jesus is in Jerusalem at the time of a festival. Jesus has begun his public ministry of proclaiming the kingdom of God so it would seem he picked a good time to visit the capital city of Israel. However, if you are looking for disciples to help you spread your message and support your ministry it would seem the pool by the sheep gate is not the place to be. The five porticoes, we are told, are “filled with invalids: blind, lame, and paralyzed.” On the other hand, this might be the perfect place to stage a spectacular miracle; a mass healing of all the sick huddled around the pool would certainly raise Jesus popularity quotient. That, as we know, is not what happened. Jesus chose to heal just one person, thereby, we can assume, disappointing all the blind, lame, and paralyzed left behind. But, it could be that Jesus chose this one person because this person was best suited to further Jesus mission. Perhaps, this one man was young, virile, with gifts and talents for spreading the gospel after his cure. Or perhaps Jesus would cure a man with a large influential family or a sizable group of well-connected friends. What the Gospel tells us is that Jesus chose to heal a

man with no friends, no family, “no one to put him in the pool.” Jesus chose a man who has been ill for thirty-eight years; probably longer than Jesus has been alive. Assuming the man was not born ill, let us guess that he came down with his illness as a child, let us guess twelve years old. That would make the man fifty years old. Jesus cures an old man, fifty years old was considered old in Jesus day; He cures an old man with no family and friends. Plus, when we read further in the Gospel when this man is asked who cured him he says he does not know the name of the person who cured him, so much for making him a great disciple or evangelist. Finally, there is the last verse of today’s Gospel, “Now that day was a Sabbath”. Keeping the strict code for Sabbath rest, Jesus should have told the ill man that he, Jesus, would be back the very next day to cure him. After all, the man had been ill for thirty-eight years. To keep the religious establishment happy, Jesus could have waited one more day out of sensitivity to other people’s beliefs. In the eyes of some, Jesus breaks the Sabbath rest by curing the man on the Sabbath. Jesus further exacerbates the Sabbath infraction by telling the man to pick up and carry his mat; also an act considered working on the Sabbath by strict observers.

What would Jesus do? According to today’s Gospel, Jesus would sabotage getting his message out by wasting time with the wrong people and then aggravating most of them by choosing to ignore their healing and healing a friendless, old man who does not take the time to remember Jesus’ name. And, Jesus does all of this on the Sabbath, thereby offending the religious sensitivities of many of the Jews in town for a festival. That’s what Jesus did. Now go and do likewise.

But, before you follow Jesus example here be sure you understand the deeper lesson of today’s Gospel. The healing of the man at Bethesda is a terrifically clumsy and inept miracle. Jesus healed only one person, leaving many invalids still blind, lame, and paralyzed. Jesus seemed to have chosen the least likely person to help his ministry, an old friendless man without a family.

And Jesus broke well known, established rules of Sabbath keeping during a festival in the heart of the Jewish nation, Jerusalem. The lesson we should learn from this, the lesson we need to learn, mark and inwardly digest from Jesus' example is this: That no matter what good thing you do, you could have done it better.

There is a list of things that could have been done to make this good thing Jesus did better; he could have:

- Picked a better candidate for the cure
- Cured the man on another day or at least told him to leave the mat until the Sabbath was over
- Took the man aside and cured him in secret so the other sick people could not see
- Draw a bigger crowd and make a bigger deal of curing the man.

Given enough time we could make the list grow and grow. Maybe, that is the point. Jesus wants us to do what he did. Jesus wants us to do good when good presents itself and not worry about a better time, a better place. Jesus wants us to do good with the knowledge that we will be criticized for not doing better.

I am not shy in telling you that the ordained ministry is a near perfect platform for verifying this teaching. For both the ordained and the lay persons church work seems to generate situations where regardless of what good thing a person does someone will always point out you could have done it better. The preacher at my ordination to the priesthood, a wonderful priest named Bill Morris, claimed in his sermon that, "the one thing most parishioners want their priest to do is that very thing that the priest decided not to do so that he could do something else." Ask any active Senior Warden or Vestry member and they will tell you that whatever good they did for the church they received comments about what they could have done better. I am confident that this situation extends beyond the church doors, into business, relationships, and life in general.

The temptation is obvious - delay doing good. Find a better time, a better situation, and a more deserving beneficiary.

Again, we have the example of Jesus Christ that in a world of near infinite possibilities no matter what good thing you do you could have done it better. The people who believe they can wait to do good at a better time, in a better situation, for a more deserving beneficiary, also believe the sign that reads: Free Beer Tomorrow.

So if you ever find yourself saying:

- I'll go back to church regularly when my life settles down
- I'll make a pledge or increase my pledge when I have a little more money
- I'll volunteer at the food bank or Habitat when I have a little more time
- I'll start voting or getting involved as soon as we get better politicians
- I'll help at school or with a Boy Scout troop or the Boys & Girls club soon as we have better kids
- I'd teach Sunday School but I need to learn more myself
- I'd do so much more if my Faith were deeper

If you ever find yourself saying, "I'd do this good thing but first it has to be a little better before I do it." Remember today's Gospel and ask, "What would Jesus do?" Amen.