

## Good Shepherd Presbyterian Church

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May 9, 2010

Sixth Sunday of Easter

Acts 16:9-15

<sup>9</sup>During the night Paul had a vision: there stood a man of Macedonia pleading with him and saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." <sup>10</sup>When he had seen the vision, we immediately tried to cross over to Macedonia, being convinced that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.

<sup>11</sup>We set sail from Troas and took a straight course to Samothrace, the following day to Neapolis, <sup>12</sup>and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia and a Roman colony. We remained in this city for some days. <sup>13</sup>On the sabbath day we went outside the gate by the river, where we supposed there was a place of prayer; and we sat down and spoke to the women who had gathered there. <sup>14</sup>A certain woman named Lydia, a worshiper of God, was listening to us; she was from the city of Thyatira and a dealer in purple cloth. The Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul. <sup>15</sup>When she and her household were baptized, she urged us, saying, "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay at my home." And she prevailed upon us.

John 5:1-9

<sup>1</sup>After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem.

<sup>2</sup>Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. <sup>3</sup>In these lay many invalids-blind, lame, and paralyzed. <sup>4, 5</sup>One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. <sup>6</sup>When Jesus saw him lying there and knew that he had been there a long time, he said to him, "Do you want to be made well?" <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 making my way, someone else steps down ahead of me." <sup>8</sup>Jesus said to him, "Stand up, take your mat and walk." <sup>9</sup>At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a sabbath.

### **"Mom's Question"**

## **Story One – Part One**

**“Do I have to come up there?” I can still hear my Mom leaning into the stairway and asking that question. It was asked after we had gone to bed and we were usually still awake.**

**It has probably been about 40 years since my Mom had to yell that up the stairs at us boys. “Do I have to come up there?” It was not a question that called for an answer. No one yelled back, “No Mom, you do not have to come up here.” It was not that kind of a question.**

**Ah Mother’s Day. Not every one of us had a June Clever Mom. Thank goodness for that! I have been so blessed in that I have had and have the kind of Mom who loved us with immeasurable love, took amazing care of us, taught us about life, and about love, and about God. She also had expectations of us—there were responsibilities and lines you do not cross.**

**A look or even the tone in her voice—even before the words—let you know where you were and if you had crossed the line into the kind of behavior that was unacceptable.**

**My brothers and I crossed that line plenty. “Do I have to come up there?”**

## **Story Two – Part One**

**“Do you want to be made well?” That is the question that Jesus asks of the man there at the Sheep Gate. For 38 years the man has been coming to that place and trying to get into the water at just the right time to reap the benefit of the whirlpool effect of the waters.**

**He tries to get into the water but there are always those who try and push him out of the way. There are always those who can move better and are swifter than he is. He needs some assistance if he is going to get**

down into the water. When Jesus comes along and asks him that question—“Ah, good thing,” the man thinks, “Here is someone who can help me get down into the water.”

But such is not the question of Jesus. The question of Jesus is not, “Can I help you into the water?” The question of Jesus is, “Do you want to be made well?”

### Story Three – Part One

On Friday evening I was at the Kennedy Center for the Performing Arts and in the Concert Hall listened to Marvin Hamlisch conduct an evening of American Pop Music under the theme “Sondheim at 80.” It was outstanding.

I will tell you that I was not there alone. I had arrived at that great Nation Performing Arts Center on a giant yellow school bus that afternoon with Mrs. Ciccottelli—yes, our very own Diana—and 40 some 5<sup>th</sup> graders of hers from her “Music Sensations” group. It is a group that she created and leads at the school where she teaches—Chapel Hill Elementary School.

For almost all of those kids this was a first—a major field trip and certainly a first time and first rate live listen to the National Symphony Orchestra.

I will also tell you that when one goes to the Kennedy Center on a big yellow school bus there are also some rules. Those rules get real specific and real clear even before anyone steps into the Hall of Nations there at the Kennedy Center. The rules as Mrs. Ciccottelli announced them: “No gum chewing. None. No cell phones. Turn them off or get them taken away. No cell phone. No running. No running. Is that clear? No running. No cell phone. No gum.”

I cautiously and quietly turned my cell phone off. Thankfully I haven't chewed gum in a few years. The instructions and cautions were perfectly clear.

#### Story Four – Part One

Ah, the plight of the Presbyterian. Let's have a meeting. We have to have a meeting. A meeting will solve all our problems. Yes, yes a meeting. We love meetings. Sometimes we even have meetings about what kind of meetings we should have—you think I'm kidding...I wish.

Often the problem—dare I say that—the problem with meetings is there is a whole lot of time spent spinning wheels. I think meetings tend to be the places where we mire into musings about history that upsets us still. “Well, when we did that last time...(fill in the blank, but it was not good).” Or better still, “That won't work and let me tell you why...” Put the brakes on that idea.

Talk, talk, talk. ...For one who loves meetings and makes much of them...I sure sound cynical.

#### Story One – Part Two

“Do I have to come up there?” This was not an opportunity for discussion. It was not a chance to have a deep conversation. I was not even a call to a meeting. Hey, I don't think it was really even a question—“Do I have to come up there?” It was always more of a threat...more of a promise than it was a question.

The real deal was this—there needed to be a different course of action. Maybe we were upstairs playing and there was some squabble going on. “Do I have to come up there?” It meant that we had better cease and desist immediately. Not later, not in a bit. Immediate action

was required. Or maybe it was bed time and we were still up there messing around and avoiding going to sleep as we were told to do.

**“Do I have to come up there?”** It was Mom’s way of letting it be known that sooner than later there had to be a course correction. Sooner than later things had better shape up—we had better get it together. Sooner than later there had to a different result. No delay. No negotiation. No sweetness and light. Clear and direct. Shift. Change. Pull it together.

### **Story Two – Part Two**

**“Do you want to be made well?”** He is asked the question but launches into the explanation about the difficulties of dealing with those who push and shove ahead of him. This being John’s Gospel it is not a surprise that he does not hear and comprehend the question. The man cannot conceive of anything beyond some assistance at getting into the water.

Not 50 verses earlier in the Gospel of John, Jesus has announced to the Samaritan woman at Jacob’s well that he is this **“living water gushing up into eternal life.”** And now Jesus encounters this man, and he asks him, **“Do you want to be made well?” “Stand up, take your mat, and walk.”**

It is a command. It is John’s Gospel—the faith here is not thinking and pondering—it is action and doing. **“Stand up, take your mat, and walk.”** It is as if Jesus says a very mothering thing here. Not a Hallmark card sort of mothering thing, but the kind of mothering thing that a real mother would say. It is like he is saying: **“Enough of this silliness. No more of the pond and the stirring waters. Enough. Walk!”**

Jesus cuts to the chase. Jesus this living water. For 38 years the man has obsessed about getting into the water—so much so that when the Lord of Life is before him he cannot see past his old routine. **Stop.**

**Change. Different course of action. Enough of this silliness. “Stand up, take your mat, and walk.”**

### **Story Three – Part Two**

**All in all I think they did a really good job of conducting themselves. Hey, they are 5<sup>th</sup> graders and almost none of them had really been to any first rate performance ever. I will say that throughout the course of the afternoon and evening there were a few times that their teacher repeated rules and quieted their voices.**

**That, however, did not happen more than about 5 dozen times! Not bad for a yellow school bus load of kids. It did cause me to think on the ride home on that yellow school bus about kids the expectations we have of them.**

**I observed in those kids and their teacher that she was not telling them to be quiet and to stay with the group because it was a fun opportunity to be mean to kids. She was doing it because she wanted to keep them all safe. She wanted to keep them all together. And, she wanted to help them learn about how to be a responsible, theater going adult.**

**Larger than that, she was helping them to see that they need to have expectations of their own accord. It is about being polite. It is about being in relationship to others. It is about what is appropriate and what is not. They needed those corrections for those moments when the time would come that there was no authority figure standing there in front of them saying, “Stop. Check yourself. What are you doing? Is this what you should be doing? Is this the best choice for you to make.”**

**It is about mothering. It is about parenting. It is also about the gospel. “Stop. Check yourself. What are you doing? It this what you should be doing? Is this the best choice for you to make?”**

## Story Four – Pat Two

Ah, it is not the meetings per se. Cynic though I sound—I love them. I really do. But, let us have a meeting where there is a result. Let us have a meeting that there is some action.

We have been having meetings longer than we have been Presbyterian. And some of us are life-longers. We have all been to those meetings with ourselves—you know the type. There is not anyone there but our own thoughts. There is no attendance, no agenda, no docket to move through. There is just our own self where we think. We ponder. We discuss it. We converse on it. We muse on it. We mull it over. We toss it back and forth and around and about and over again.

We may even talk about it with others. We may even seek counsel. Some may journal. Some pray. Some discuss. Some confer. Some chat about it. But the result is the same—ah yes, the same. “The meeting concluded with the scheduling of another meeting.”

No action. Great thoughts. Great discussion. Great imagination. But no action.

I’m not downing thoughts or discussion, or even imagination...but until they result in action we are just sitting by the side of the road waiting for someone to put us in the swirling water. “Do you want to be well?” “Get up. Walk.” If we don’t take some action—do more, do different, do over—then yes, Mom—you do need to come up here!

Stop. Check yourself. Turn off your cell phone. Get on the big yellow school bus. Get off the big yellow school bus. Whatever it takes—the gospel calls for action. Get up. Walk. Be in relationship. Mother. Parent this world. Take your mat and go. Listen to the music. Don’t wait for her to come up here. Meeting adjourned.

**Meeting minutes: “The Question was posed: ‘What action is God calling you to take?’”**