

The Sixth Sunday of Easter
May 26, 2019

Text: John 5:1-9

Theme: "A Sound Sound"

Annoying sounds, we know them when we hear them. A prime example put forth is often fingernails on the chalkboard. But this is fast becoming an historical example as chalkboards are going the way of the horse and buggy. The neighbor's dog barking, and barking, and barking, and barking, now that's annoying. And do you remember this sound (blowing water through a straw into a glass of water)? It is kind of fun for young kids. parents don't find it so much so. Is it a spill concern? A germ concern? The last should not really be a concern as the germs are self-contained.

Today our theme is "A Sound Sound." These two words are spelled exactly the same and pronounced exactly the same but they are two different words entirely. One is the noun as in what one hears. The other is an adjective that means "whole", "reliable," "in good condition." The columns in this building are sound. Your mother-in-law gives sound advice. You are following a sound exercise plan. So a sound sound is a reliable one, one to be trust. A good response to a sound sound is, "I like the sound of that."

In our text for today those gathered around the pool were waiting for a bubbling sound. It would be the sound of hope, of healing. For the man Jesus encounters it always turns out to be a frustrating sound. It means it's time to jump in the pool, pronto. But that was the whole problem. His legs were not sound. Today this man hears a new sound, the voice of Jesus. It is a sound that brings soundness.

We go poolside in our text. There's a lot of people, a whole multitude gathered there under those five roofed colonnades. All the swimming pools in the New Testament are in

Jerusalem, the one here and the other in John 9. Both are tied to miracles of Jesus. These pools were not for swimming, actually. It must have been quite a sight, the unsound gathered under the roofs held up by those sound columns.

For those gathered the theme song of life probably had more of the sound of a dirge than a happy ditty. Here, we are told, were found the blind, the lame, and the paralyzed. They are described as invalids. They have been there for varied periods of time. Surely some have come and some have gone. Were some even healed? Some must have given up and decided to spend their time elsewhere. Could some have died there in their wait? How long had the man of the moment been there? We are told he had been an invalid for 38 years. We are also told Jesus knew he had already been there a long time. It may not have been the full 38 years, but it had been a long time. So he had nothing to do but lie around the pool all day? Well, that was not what he wanted to do, but that was all his body was capable of.

This multitude of the unsound bodies are all waiting for the sound that might change things. They were waiting for that stirring sound. King James translates it “troubled” (**tara, ssw**, tarasso—stir, agitate, disturb). This could be the end of trouble if you could just be the first one in those troubled waters. So what was really going in these waters? You notice our text goes from verse 3 to 5. The King James has, “For an angel went down at a certain season into the pool, and troubled the water: whosoever then first after the troubling of the water stepped in was made whole of whatsoever disease he had.” This is not in the earliest copies of John. It is probably someone’s explanation that got added in. Something had to be going on in those waters, maybe not much, but something or else all these people would not have been gathered there. John doesn’t give us any details, instead he puts before us the sound words of Jesus.

Jesus addresses the man, asks him a question with a pretty obvious answer. “Do you want to be healed?” (v. 6) The man doesn’t give him a direct answer; instead, he puts before Jesus his dilemma, “While I’m going, another steps down before me.” (v. 7) Imagine the sounds of the scene when the bubbling sound begins. Of course there is the bubbling sound. There would be cries of urgency, the sound of feet hitting the pavement (the legs of the blind worked fine), the sounds of pushing and shoving, of yelps of those being tripped (what the arms of a crippled man could do to a blind man running), the moans of those pulling themselves along the best they could, and the groans of disappointment. Was there ever the sound of soundness restored? Such were the sounds by the pool.

What are the sounds at the beach? There are the sounds of wave breaking on the shore, of gulls calling at a safe distance, the splash in the water of bodies, and cries of a good time. These are the sounds that make up a contented package. Maybe the beach experience is not what we think of when we think of those happy places. It could be at or on a lake. It might be a picnic, a family gathering. It could be the crackling fire in a cabin. We have our own memories when it comes to the sound tracks of a sound life.

But we also know life has its troubling sounds. “We’re done. I don’t want you around anymore.” “There’s this curious spot that has showed up on your scan.” “We’re sorry to inform you that your identity has been stolen.” We obviously don’t wish to hear the sound of such sounds. We would avoid the sound of troubling waters if we could.

The sound of waters, many waters, is one of power and often danger in the Old Testament. “Stretch out Your hand from on high; rescue me and deliver me from the many waters, from the hand of foreigners.” (Psalm 144:4, see also Isaiah 7:13) The scene of many waters gets a lot of screen time today. There is no shortage of video available to

see of flood waters, quiet streams transformed to torrents, of property, whole houses carried away. When we think of the power of many waters think of something like Niagara Falls and the cries (though only momentary) of those swept away. We can relate to that metaphor of many waters. Troubles are not leaving, more trouble is sweeping through, many waters multiplying. There is turbulence. We think we may be swept away as we are in the water. And when we think it can't get any worse, something big and scary jumps in the water and is coming our way.

But many waters also conveys a different picture in Scripture. It is a description of the awesomeness of presence, that is, glory and might. In Ezekiel 43:2 it describes the approach of God, “And behold, the glory of the God of Israel was coming from the east. And the sound of his coming was like the sound of many waters, and the earth shone with his glory.”

This is not a good sound for the unholy. After his healing the man in our text hears some accusing sounds, “It's the Sabbath and it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” (v. 10) Jesus finds the man and says to him, ‘Look, you are now sound, no longer be sinning so that something worse may not happen.’ (v. 14) What could be worse, besides the obvious of being crippled for 39 years? The worse is much worse than that. It is the sound of weeping and gnashing of teeth in outer darkness. Such will be the sound produced by those not heeding the voice of the One who calls from death to life even now, the sound made by those who have heard that damning sound of “depart from me.”

But here in our text the man hears a marvelous sound. “Rise up, pick up your mat, and walk.” And the man who had not taken a step in 38 years does just that. Imagine 38 years of pulling yourself around with your arms or being picked up and carried are

suddenly at an end. He picks up his mat and walks. The grip of his infirmity is no match for the sound words of Jesus.

The death bringing accusations of the law are no match for the sound words of Jesus, the sweet sound of the Gospel. Lydia heard it, heard down there on the beach, maybe not the beach, but the shore of the river in Philippi. Lydia had a lot of good things in life. But now this seller of purple goods was to hear of something far better. Paul was down there by the river because he had heard and heeded the voice of a man in Macedonia calling out, “Come over...help us (Acts 10:9).” We read of Lydia, “The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul.” And she was baptized and her household as well (Acts 10:14, 15).

We hear the great sound, someone has faced the awful sound of accusation for us. He heard the sounds of human anger, and ridicule, and mockery, but more the sound of God’s law crying out for justice. He is satisfying that justice as He hangs there in the dark while the silence of the Father booms forth. He knew it was coming. It was why He had come. “Now is my soul troubled. And what shall I say? ‘Father, save me from this hour?’ But for this purpose I have come to this hour.” (John 12:27) He will pray in an even more troubled state in the garden. Yes, He knew it was coming, but stayed the course, endured. He stood in the channel weighed down with the sins of the world as the waters of God’s justice roll in and overwhelm. It is for us. It is completed.

We know the sounds of despair of His followers will give way to joy as we saw last week. The sound will be heard of, “He is not here. Here is risen as He said.” They will hear from the mouth of Jesus, “Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.” (John 20:21) This must have brought to their minds the sound of His words in the Upper Room. “Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you. Not as the world

gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid.” (John 14:27)

His words are like the sound of soothing and life-giving waters. His words are soothing and life-giving waters. Imagine the sound of a brook, or of a fountain in a pond, or just the sound of water being poured in a glass to quench your thirst. In Christ we have gone from no people to God’s people, those who now serve other people to help bring soundness where there was only brokenness before, to bring the sound of the life-giving word of Jesus.

One day that sound of eternal praise will be heard, and more, we, believers in Christ, will join our voices to that praise, a sound that is described as “many waters.” “Then I heard what seemed to be the voice of a great multitude, like the roar of many waters and like the sound of mighty peals of thunder, crying out, “Hallelujah! For the Lord our God the Almighty reigns (Revelation 19:6). Those made new now in Christ, we lift up our voices in praise, a sound that will resound forever. For Jesus’ sake. Amen