



Sunday Reflection Ordinary Time

in the Charges of St Margarets, Renfrew
& St Johns, Johnstone



For Sunday 22 May 2022

Easter 6

Come and celebrate with us as we worship the One who is light and life. Come to the One who offers more than the fruits of hard work, restful leisure and good luck. Come to the One who offers transformation and renewal through faith..

Reflection for this week's Gospel teaching

"Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes." John 5:2

An Illustration to set the scene

The waters of Buxton were so valued for their healing properties by the Victorians that a fabulous spa sprang up around them. It's still beautiful today, if a little rough round the edges.

All over the world such places have evolved.

Budapest in Hungary, Rotorua in New Zealand and Baden-Baden in Germany are just a few of the places where water and healing have shaped business, architecture and tourism.

Many towns today have their own pool, perhaps a sauna, jacuzzi and treatments involving mud, stones, massage and goodness knows what else alongside our everyday temples of fitness – the gym and leisure centre.

And even now, strange rituals of water and healing pop up.

There has been much debate recently about a treatment involving fish nibbling away at bathers' dead skin.

Looking at the teaching of the Gospel

Did this porticoed pool by the Sheep Gate share some of these characteristics?

It's rather easy to skip over this strange place as simply a setting for a personal story – that of a sick man who has been there for thirty-eight years.

The man explains that when waters are stirred, he sets off towards them – hoping for what?

Healing, an easing of pain?

We don't know.

But before he can get down there into the waters, someone steps into the water ahead of him.

So many things aren't said.

Why does the man just hang about at the edge of the pool?

Why doesn't he ask for help?

It's not very long before we start to wonder if he's at fault in some way.

Apart from anything else, success was so long in coming, you wonder why he hadn't given up long before.

We have no idea if the people around the pool were rich or poor, whether they were all as sick as our man, or why this place was so attractive to them.

There were pre-Jewish cults of healing that inspired similar rituals, and it's hard to imagine how God would require people to participate in such a lottery of healing.

The whole place sounds like a hotbed of hopelessness, pointless ritual and superstition.

And into this horrible place breezes Jesus.

Do you want to be well? he asks the man.

And the man, perhaps used to having to respond to accusation, starts on an explanation.

Jesus' solution is to unlock the gate to this prison of hopelessness and simply let the man out.

Read on and you'll see that the man Jesus picks out is not exactly an appealing character.

Even so, Jesus doesn't seem to require him to pass some kind of heavenly means test before he bestows his gifts of healing.

The aim of John's Gospel is to inspire us to believe, and to show us that what Jesus offers is better even than the basics of life and the fixes that we seek to make it better.

For John, too, water and healing are connected, but the water Jesus offers is fundamentally different.

Whether it's the transforming water of baptism, Nicodemus' rebirth, or the Samaritan woman's water of life, John wants us to know that Jesus is as essential as the basics and an effective remedy as opposed to all the magic, nonsense and cruelty of the age.

How can we reflect on the application to our lives?

Things may be different for us with our ever-advancing medical science and health facilities, but even so, people from all walks of life get locked into a prison of misery, pointless ritual and superstition.

Around the edges of medical science, the health and happiness industry is booming.

And the strange thing, given how much we spend on it, is that it helps so little.

The fancy spa, the latest cycling gear or the slimming club solve the problem for only a tiny minority.

The rest of us are just the same old people in lycra.

Jesus offers a true transformation, as opposed to a temporary fix or a complex set of rules to follow or things to buy.

John's Gospel wants us to be convinced of this.

It is this belief that unlocks prisons of body and mind, and is the powerhouse that enables us to take this message to others and to unlock their prisons in turn. Easter – the pinnacle of our year – is a great time to think this through.

The Good News.

What a promise!

Have we made it ours?

“Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes.” *John 5:2*

Please share your response to this reflection to Rector@SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk – did anything speak to you? Did you feel challenged, angered, consoled by something in the words? How did God' spirit move you as you read it? Have you shared the words with someone else? Is this a worthwhile thing to make available to folk whilst some folk are not able to meet for corporate worship to share in word and sacrament? What are your thoughts?

www.SECStJohnStMargaret.org.uk