

“Made Well”
Psalm 67; John 5:1-9
West End Presbyterian Church
5.22.22
Easter 6
Sermon #23

Psalm 67 (NRSV)

To the leader: with stringed instruments. A Psalm. A Song.

1 May God be gracious to us and bless us

and make his face to shine upon us, *Selah*

2 that your way may be known upon earth,

your saving power among all nations.

3 Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you.

4 Let the nations be glad and sing for joy,

for you judge the peoples with equity

and guide the nations upon earth. *Selah*

5 Let the peoples praise you, O God;

let all the peoples praise you.

6 The earth has yielded its increase;

God, our God, has blessed us.

7 May God continue to bless us;

let all the ends of the earth revere him.

The Word of God for the People of God! **Thanks be to God!**

John 5:1-9 (NRSV)

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

2 Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. 3 In these lay many ill, blind, lame, and paralyzed people. 5 One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 6 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?” 7 The ill 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.” 8 Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” 9 At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk.

Now that day was a Sabbath.

The Word of God for the People of God! **Thanks be to God!**

Let us pray: May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

Back in March of 1990, there were protesters in front of the Capitol Building in Washington, D.C.¹ A man had finished his speech and there were people in their wheelchairs and leaning on their crutches who eventually left behind their assistive devices and began the crawl up the steps of the Capitol. Yes, they crawled all 78 marble steps. That day is known as the Capitol Crawl.

A little girl was with them at the time. Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins. At the time, she was eight. This little girl with cerebral palsy got on all fours and climbed the steps. It took her about an hour to complete. In her interview with ABC a couple of years ago, Keelan-Chaffins

¹<https://abcnews.go.com/US/30th-anniversary-disability-civil-rights-protest-advocates-push/story?id=69491417>

said she was prepared to “take all night if [she had] to.”² During that hour on that unusually hot day in March in D.C., she would pause and ask for water on several occasions so she could make it. People cheered for Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins. She had plenty of water available to her because she had a lot of support from fellow protesters.

The Capitol Crawl on that day over 30 years ago was not the first disability rights protest that occurred. For Keelan-Chaffins, this was her second year of protesting. She had been doing this since she was six. In the years before this day in 1990, Ms. Keelan-Chaffins participated in disability rights protests in other major cities across the United States and Canada. The year before, however, at the age of seven, this little girl was mistakenly arrested for crossing the protesting line so she could use the bathroom. But, this day in

² Ibid.

March of 1990 was different. Years of organizing by disability rights activists led up to the Capitol Crawl. This was another moment in the struggle for Civil Rights. Just over four months later, then-President George H. W. Bush signed the *Americans with Disabilities Act*. Because of that law many can use ramps and handicap accessible fuel lanes as well as anti-discriminatory protections in the workplace and other facets of society.

But, in the recent interview with ABC News, Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins laments the fact that the hard work that led up to President Bush's signing of that law is being forgotten and erased.

"In some ways, I kind of feel like we've stepped backwards a bit," Keelan-Chaffins told ABC News, later adding "even though, you know, the ADA has granted greater access -- physical access to people with disabilities, I honestly don't believe that the ADA has solved every aspect of discrimination or discriminatory behavior

*that we still face today."*³

Just weeks before the interview with ABC, Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins went to a restaurant with her mother in Denver, CO. They couldn't maneuver their way around the restaurant with Jennifer's assistive devices because the tables were so close together. They decided to sit outside and eat in the middle of winter. The restaurant was also not ADA compliant.

Keelan-Chaffins continues in the article:

*"This isn't just about, you know, having a handicap parking sticker and, you know, having a curb-out here and there, you know, and maybe being able to use RTD (Regional Transportation District) on occasion," said Keelan-Chaffins' mom. "This is about a civil right."*⁴

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Certainly, Keelan-Chaffins and the man in John 5 share a lot in common. They are determined. They are courageous. They are persistent. They are strong. And they have been tossed aside by society.

Before I go on, I need to say I don't have a physical, cognitive, or sensory disability. I have never faced discrimination because of my abilities just as I have never faced discrimination because of my gender, sexual orientation, and ethnicity. I do not pretend that I'm speaking for anyone. But, I can't help but think about the similarities in John 5 and the story about Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins' work in the struggle for Civil Rights.

The man in John has been waiting to be healed at the pool for 38 years. Yet, every time he has an opportunity to get in, someone beats him to it. Possibly, others have family or friends to help. But, this man, for whatever reason, has no one. Yet, he is persistent for 38 years. This man represents people in his society and ours who have been ignored. The man's decades-long persistence points out the failures of society, just like the Capitol Crawl did decades ago. The man's lack of help represents the lie of "pull yourself up by your own bootstraps". The Capitol Crawl, just like every struggle for Civil Rights before and since 1990, calls out the same lie, too. How can someone pull themselves up by their own bootstraps when tools to help level the playing field are unavailable?

Sure, Jesus healed the man in John 5 and he could take his mat and walk. The man, however, was not "less than" due to his disability, even though that's what many have believed. His sin,

whatever it was, didn't cause his disability. Although, many then, as now, believe that's the case. The sin is committed by society.

Jesus did what no one else had done: Affirm his being made in God's image and treating him with love and compassion he had not felt. Treating the man with love and compassion was not convenient. Treating our neighbors with love and compassion by adjusting the physical spaces for those with particular disabilities is not convenient. But, it is part of our calling.

I walk around our campus a lot. I don't have to tell you how beautiful it looks. This is one of the finest spots around the area. I am thankful for all of the work that has been done over the years to make our buildings more accessible. Tons of work has gone into it. Yet, if someone from the congregation who had difficulties wanted to get into the chancel, they'd have to go out to the right of the pulpit, go outside, and take the next door on the left, come back

behind the chancel, and enter the door to my back in order to come up here. There's still a ways to go. And I have not even mentioned various types of cognitive or sensory disabilities and the ways to help make spaces more hospitable to our neighbors.

There's still a ways to go in our society, as Jennifer Keelan-Chaffins pointed out. Laws and regulations protecting the most vulnerable in our society must be strengthened. It should not be based on how much money someone has because no one deserves to wait for nearly 40 years before they're assisted. No one deserves to crawl for an hour up 78 marble steps into the Capitol Building just to get people's attention. Yet, these brave people over the years have done it and will continue to do so.

Loving our neighbors is not a convenient command. But, it is

necessary and full of risk. Sure, it changes the spaces we have been accustomed to and it may make some a bit uncomfortable. Like Jesus, we are to show up anyway and *listen*. Listen to the needs of the people and support them in this work. Listen and support. We're not there to speak for them, we are there to listen, learn, and love. I'll be the first to say: I have a lot to learn.

As Jesus loved that brave man by the pool and as Jesus loves the courageous people over 30 years ago who crawled up the steps on that hot day in March, may we do the same and may we push our local and national cultures to do better because everyone, regardless of ability and regardless if we can see or not see the differently abled around us, is a beloved child of God.

Beloved, trust this Good News!

In the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. Amen.