# Congregational-Presbyterian Church

 **“God’s Work”**

**John 5:1-17**

**February 3, 2019**

Who is Jesus? In the first four chapters of his Gospel, John introduces Jesus as the Word of God come to earth as a human being. We have learned from John that Jesus is the Lamb of God, that Jesus is the Son of God, and that Jesus is the Messiah promised by God. Jesus has begun his ministry by being baptized and calling people to follow him. He has shown his glory through miracles, and he has had conversations with people about how they can become part of the new life, the eternal life, he has come to offer all who believe in him. But now, in chapter five, John begins to trace a growing rejection of Jesus’ work. I invite you to turn with me to John 5:1-17

Afterward Jesus returned to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish holy days. Inside the city, near the Sheep Gate, was the pool of Bethesda, with five covered porches. Crowds of sick people—blind, lame, or paralyzed—lay on the porches. One of the men lying there had been sick for thirty-eight years. When Jesus saw him and knew he had been ill for a long time, he asked him, “Would you like to get well?” “I can’t, sir,” the sick man said, “for I have no one to put me into the pool when the water bubbles up. Someone else always gets there ahead of me.” Jesus told him, “Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” Instantly, the man was healed! He rolled up his sleeping mat and began walking! But this miracle happened on the Sabbath, so the Jewish leaders objected. They said to the man who was cured, “You can’t work on the Sabbath! The law doesn’t allow you to carry that sleeping mat!” But he replied, “The man who healed me told me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” “Who said such a thing as that?” they demanded. The man didn’t know, for Jesus had disappeared into the crowd. But afterward Jesus found him in the Temple and told him, “Now you are well; so stop sinning, or something even worse may happen to you.” Then the man went and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had healed him. So the Jewish leaders began harassing Jesus for breaking the Sabbath rules.  But Jesus replied, “My Father is always working, and so am I.”

A man is mowing a lawn with an old fashioned push mower when his five-year-old son, sitting on the porch and watching him, says, “I want to mow.” The father tells his son that it is hard to mow and asks him whether he is sure that he wants to do it. “I want to mow,” the little boy repeats. “Ok,” says dad as he walks over to the porch and sits down, “go ahead.” The boy puts hits small hands on the mower handle and begins to push, but nothing happens. He pushes harder, straining until his muscles begin to tremble, but he can’t budge the mower. Finally, he lets go of the mower, hangs his head, and says, “I can’t.” Dad walks back to the mower, takes his son’s hands and places them back on the handle, puts his own hands next to his son’s, and says, “Let’s try again.” Gloriously the mower moves and together they finish mowing the lawn.

“Would you like to get well?” Of course the man wants to get well. He has tried to get well, done everything he knows to do to get well including trying to get into the healing pool, but he has been unable to heal himself.

What about you and me? Do we realize that Jesus is asking that very same question of us today, “Would you like to get well?” Is there a sickness of some kind in our life, whether physical or emotional or spiritual, and we have done all we know to do to try and heal ourselves, but nothing has really changed. We have consulted experts, read books, tried to change our life for the better, but to no avail. “Would you like to get well?”

The work of God, which is the work of Jesus, is the work of salvation. Biblically, the Greek word we translate with the English word “salvation” is *soteria,* a broader term in Greek than we often think of in English. Concepts that are inherent in *soteria* include restoration, safety, health and well being, as well as protection from destruction. “Would you like to get well?” Jesus asks of us. Would you like to be restored into a loving relationship with me and my Father, would you like to be healed and experience well being, would you like to be protected from an eternity spent in hell? Of course we do!

But, until we, like the man by the pool, admit that we can’t save ourselves, there is nothing Jesus can do for us. He will not force himself on us, but patiently waits for us to humbly admit that we need him to do the saving. “I can’t heal myself, Jesus.”

“Stand up, pick up your mat, and walk!” Like the father with his son mowing the yard, Jesus doesn’t tell us to go back to the porch and watch him do what we have admitted that we can’t do by ourselves. He comes alongside, giving us his strength, and says, “Let’s do this together.” Jesus is at work in our lives, doing the Father’s will, but only in-so-far as we are willing to move on from our places of sickness and onto paths of health. We are new creations, through Christ, and we are called to live a new life, to walk a new path. We are called by Jesus to join him in the work of bringing healing not only to our own lives, but to be a part of his healing work in the lives of others.

When we do so, as did the healed man, we will face opposition. As he obediently walked into a new life, carrying his mat, he was confronted by the religious rule makers of his day who told him to stop doing what Jesus had instructed. So we today, who desire to walk with Christ, will face resistance, even hostility. How can we repeat the words of Jesus that he is the only way to the Father, when the rule makers of today tell us we must affirm many ways to God? How can we insist on following God’s moral and ethical commands when the rule makers tell us to be tolerant and allow everyone to do what is right in their own eyes? How can we tell people that Jesus is the Truth, when the rule makers tell us there is no such thing as absolute truth? We can and we do because that it what it means to join Jesus in doing God’s work in the world. We give witness to who Jesus is, based on what he has said and done.

The next time you find yourself sick in some way, whether of the body or the heart or the mind, ask yourself whether you have been trying to push that heavy lawnmower without Jesus’ help. And, if you have, respond to his invitation of “Would you like to get well?” with your honest “I can’t.” He will gladly join you and together you will move toward healing.

This morning we celebrate the Lord’s Supper, the meal in which Jesus told his disciples that he was about to die for their sake. “This bread is my body – this cup is my blood – eat and drink in remembrance of me.” Together, us and Jesus, doing what we can’t do by ourselves. Receiving forgiveness for sin so that, like him, we may be raised into eternal life, a life where all sickness has been made well, where every tear has been dried, where the lawn has been mowed and it looks great.