



Lenten Reflection for Tuesday, March 29th

Matt Garklavs

You can listen to the reading and reflection by clicking [here](#).

John 5:1 - 16

After this there was a festival of the Jews, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem. Now in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate there is a pool, called in Hebrew Beth-zatha, which has five porticoes. In these lay many invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. One man was there who had been ill for thirty-eight years. 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?” 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.” Jesus said to him, “Stand up, take your mat and walk.” At once the man was made well, and he took up his mat and began to walk. Now that day was a sabbath. So the Jews said to the man who had been cured, “It is the sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your mat.” But he answered them, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Take up your mat and walk.’” They asked him, “Who is the man who said to you, ‘Take it up and walk?’” Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there. Later Jesus found him in the temple and said to him, “See, you have been made well! Do not sin any more, so that nothing worse happens to you.” The man went away and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well. Therefore the Jews started persecuting Jesus, because he was doing such things on the sabbath.

We’d like to think that doing the right thing and helping others comes with a reward, but it sometimes seems to carry a risk. The first thing I thought of while reading this passage was the phrase “no good deed goes unpunished”. It’s an odd turn of events: Jesus performs a miracle by healing a sick man and the initial response by authorities is “He did *what* on a *Saturday*?!” Jesus of course knew what he was doing and paid no mind to the circumstances. He recognized another human in need & chose to help him regardless (or perhaps in spite) of the consequences.

As I reflect upon this reading, Russia's invasion of Ukraine weighs heavily on my mind. This humanitarian crisis is affecting all of us and it's hitting close to home for me. I'm half Russian, half Ukrainian and come from a long family line of Orthodox clergy. I also spent some time studying abroad in Russia during college, which was like a spiritual pilgrimage for me. My memories of attending church abroad and alone as a 20 year old feels like a distant dream today. I've harbored deep disapproval with my Russian heritage for some time, but these recent events and the Russian Orthodox Church's cynical support of Putin's actions has slammed that door shut for the foreseeable future.

It's easy for me to speak my mind on this without fear of retribution. The same can't be said for people of my generation in Russia right now who critique their government. For them, doing the right thing and standing up to tyranny carries a huge risk. It's no surprise that so many are leaving their home rather than stay and face an inevitable prison sentence.

Reading this passage reminds us that Jesus also lived during a period of social strife. His teachings and miracles inspired many, but they also made him a pariah. He accepted this fate, enduring persecution, judgment, pain, and eventually died on the cross. It's a sobering story, but we find hope in Jesus' acceptance of suffering and his resurrection as we go through lent during this difficult time.

One part of my Russian spiritual faith that I will always appreciate is the concept of kenoticism. This term "refers to the teaching that it is a pious and praiseworthy act to accept suffering, in particular undeserved suffering, voluntarily and without complaint". I find this characterization of suffering very profound and to me it captures the essence of what we aspire to do as Christians during lent. Like Jesus, we try to empty ourselves of our own desires and accept the divine will of God. One hopes that as we make this transition that it also comes with an inclination of care and compassion towards ourselves and with each other.



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