

# “We’re In Hot Water Folks ... and Lot’s of It!”

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## Scripture:

John 5: 1-13

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 invalids—blind, lame, and paralyzed. 4 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 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." 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. 10 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." 11 But he answered them, "The man who made me well said to me, 'Take up your mat and walk.'" 12 They asked him, "Who is the man who said to you, 'Take it up and walk?'" 13 Now the man who had been healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had disappeared in the crowd that was there.

## Sermon:

I had a really difficult time trying to find a suitable scripture passage for my reflection this morning.

First, when I put “hot water” into the “biblegateway.com” filter no matches came up.

The same thing happened when I tried the words “steam” or “boiling water.”

“Hot showers” also failed to produce anything.

“How could I dedicate our new hot-water-on-demand-hot-water-heater, without any specific scriptural references?” I thought.

Exhausted, I decided to take a nap, (of course I often take naps even when I’m not exhausted from working on my sermons) and that’s when it came to me.

The story of Jesus healing a crippled man by a pool next to the Sheep Gate of Jerusalem.

I have actually been there, at the excavation that many archeologists think might be this very pool.

The earliest documents of this story call the place Bethzatha, but other versions call it Bethesda which means, "House of Mercy." During Jesus' times, the pool was believed to have healing powers. However the part about an angel actually stirring the waters is found only in a small number of later manuscripts of John. Whatever the case, according to this one unnamed invalid not everyone was able to find healing in those magical waters.

But what does all this have to do with the dedication this morning of our new, fancy, schmancy, state of the art, tankless, hot-water-on-demand hot water heater?

Okay, okay I'm getting to that, but first a little history is in order.

When we first opened our doors on Friday nights, nearly four years ago, showers were not part of the equation. Offering folks showers didn't happen until about a year later. But since then it has been a staple of what I like to call, "Friday Nights at the Mennonites!"

I have also wanted to subtitle it, "Warm space, hot food and a hot shower." But of course couldn't because we always ran out of hot water!

At first folks would let us know when the hot water ran out, usually well before the evening was even half over and well before half of the 30 or so folks had a chance to get in the showers.

We would bug Mark and he would monkey a bit with the settings on the water heater.

We tried encourage shorter showers or take breaks to try and let some of the water warm up a bit.

However, inevitably the majority of the folks who did get wet also had to endure a quick but chilling torrent.

We just learned to live with the limitations of what we had. Surprisingly no one really complained and most were actually grateful to just get a shower. And that's the way it was for nearly three years.

But not anymore, not as of two weeks ago,  
when we installed our new tankless, hot-water-on-demand heater  
that can now stir and boil all the hot water we need!

But of course things began months before this.

Was it an angel? Perhaps?

Certainly one that came in an unexpected disguise for sure.

Here's how some of it likely went:

Mark (who knows a lot about mechanical stuff for houses)  
mentioned to Annie (or maybe me, but if he did I forgot),  
that if we replaced our current hot water heater  
with a tankless, hot-water-on-demand, hot water heater  
we would then have more than enough hot water  
for every shower on Friday nights!

So then Annie came to me, or maybe it was in an Elders meeting  
(you see, as my aunt Elsie used to say, "My forgettory  
is better than my memory!") to suggest we consider this.

"But," I'm sure I must have initially responded,  
"but we just put in a brand new, fancy and quite expensive  
hot water heater and it's still only a few years old."

Just like the religious leaders in our scripture this morning  
who couldn't rejoice about healing a man on the Sabbath,

I guess my frugal Mennonite upbringing just couldn't comprehend  
replacing something that wuzn't worn out yet!

Or as, in my father's common practice,  
we hadn't even tried to fix a couple times already.

In addition these kinds of water heaters aren't cheap,  
they're nearly twice the price of more conventional heaters!  
Even if we had the money, how could we justify the cost?  
Nothing about this project seemed prudent, practical or necessary.

And yes, I guess, when one considers many of the hardships  
folks daily endure in our world,  
a hot shower does seem like a luxury.

But boy, do I love a hot shower!  
And I'm guessing most of you do to?

I'm sure most everyone here has taken  
at least a couple cold showers in their lives.  
And I'm also guessing you likely didn't enjoy it all that much.

As most of you know I spent two years in the Philippines  
teaching agriculture, shortly after graduating from college.  
During that entire time I don't think I ever had a hot shower!

But considering that it was a tropical climate  
a cold shower isn't all that bad.

Usually after a minute the body adjust to the temperature of the water  
just like it often does when you jump in the ocean.

But the initial burst is still always a shock to the system  
and so every morning for two years I would stand for a moment  
and brace myself as turned the faucet.

I know, I know you all feel extremely sorry for me,  
but as I said, there are far worse things to endure in life.  
Hopefully that experience made me a better man?  
And hopefully because of that I am less likely  
take hot water for granted.

But I must admit that I sure do not miss  
those cold showers one bit.

Of course none of us really "needs" a hot shower  
nor do any of us really deserve a hot shower.  
I certainly do not "need" it.

After all I have a number of other luxuries in my life  
to compensate if I had to go without hot showers.

But especially on cold and damp Friday nights  
when many folks have to be outside all day  
walking the mean streets of Ft Collins, come shuffling through our doors,  
well, those folks I think, really do deserve  
at least one small luxury like a hot shower.

It is one of those simple pleasures of life  
that can often make a big difference.

Hot water can actually make someone's day.  
And for some of Friday night guests  
it's the only chance they may have all week to get a shower.

And I would add, some folks really do "need" a hot shower!  
Arthritis as well as aching muscles and bones  
from carrying a backpack all day, can be soothed by hot water.

As one woman put it last Friday, the hot water  
"was a healing blessing for my back pain."

And now everyone who wants or needs a hot shower  
on Friday nights will get one!

Cuz we're in hot water folks... and lots of it!

Allow me to paraphrase that venerable prophet Amos,  
"But let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness  
like a never ending stream of hot water!"  
And unlike the case of the man in our story,  
the healing possibilities of hot water will no longer  
be only for those who show up early  
or who manage to get themselves to the head of the line.  
Egalite, fraternité, and hot water for all!  
Sorry, just got carried away there a bit.

Perhaps in the broad scheme of things  
hot showers may not end homelessness in America?

But, like a lot of things, we do know that it can make a big difference  
for one person at a specific point in that person's life.

It can also help us challenge some misguided assumptions.  
Does everything we do for others have to be quantified,  
analyzed for efficacy and efficiency and always and only  
consistent with the original goals of the proposed program?

We spent over \$4000 on this contraption and certainly  
that money could have been used for more pressing needs.

But as followers of Jesus we know that things are radically different in God's kingdom - well, at least they're supposed to be!  
We are supposed to practice a Divine economics where everything good and necessary flows in abundance. Its backwards and in is in giving that we actually receive.

It is a community where no one is considered "undeserving" or "unworthy."

A reality where kindness is the gauge of success.

I am reminded of a saying that I often find on bumper stickers. And yes, it is a bit hokey but apropos, "Never underestimate the power of a single act of kindness..."

But there ain't nothing hokey about being kind to each other! We all need some kindness in our lives. And the world out there sure needs a whole heapin' bunch of it! And who can really say that one small act of kindness might not change the world or change someone's life?

Remember, Jesus did say, "Whenever you did it to the least of my bothers or sisters you actually did it to me."

But in the end we really know that it ain't really about hot water at all.

We all know that this shiny, new, state of the art, tankless, hot-water-on-demand device will wear out some day.

But if it is a symbol, or even just a token, of our burning desires to be kind and generous to those Jesus calls his brothers and sisters, then hopefully the warmth of our welcoming embrace and the genuineness of our joy filled hearts, will continue to enable true healing to occur here in this building, long after this shiny new box is dumped at the scrap yard!

If we keep our focus on this, then we may become a true place of genuine soul healing warmth, a source of hot and sustaining nourishment, as well as abundant, troubling hot waters.

Dare we seek to become like that pool next to the Sheep gate  
a true “house of mercy?”

After all we do know, I think, that what we do for others,  
in the end, will never rust, wear out or even go out of style!

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