

# Love Our Neighbor: “For the City”

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Please consider donating to this work in the San Francisco Bay Area online at ChristchurchEastBay.org. Good morning, Christchurch. I'm Susie Shin, and I'm part of the Oakland Family Monthly Community Group.

I'll be reading today's scripture from John chapter 5, verses 1 to 18, as printed in your liturgy. A reading from the Gospel according to John.

Some time later, Jesus went up to Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. Now there is in Jerusalem, near the Sheep Gate, a pool, which in Aramaic is called Bethesda, and which is surrounded by five covered colonnades.

Here a great number of disabled people used to lie, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed. One who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. When Jesus saw him lying there and learned that he had been in this condition for a long time, he asked him, Do you want to get well?

[ 1 : 15 ] Sir, the invalid replied, I have no one to help me into the pool when the water is stirred. While I am trying to get in, someone else goes down ahead of me. Then Jesus said to him, Get up, pick up your mat and walk.

At once the man was cured, he picked up his mat and walked. The day on which this took place was a Sabbath. And so the Jewish leaders said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath. The law forbids you to carry your mat.

But he replied, The man who made me well said to me, Pick up your mat and walk. So they asked him, Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk? The man who was healed had no idea who it was, for Jesus had slipped away into the crowd that was there.

Later, Jesus found him at the temple and said to him, See, you are well again. Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you. The man went away and told the Jewish leaders that it was Jesus who had made him well.

So, because Jesus was doing these things on the Sabbath, the Jewish leaders began to persecute him. In his defense, Jesus said to them, My father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working.

[ 2 : 22 ] For this reason, they tried all the more to kill him. Not only was he breaking the Sabbath, but he was even calling God his own father, making himself equal with God. This is the Gospel of the Lord.

Praise to you, O Christ. Father, we want to hear from you this morning. We want to see as you see. We want to live as you've called us to live.

We want to be the church that you made us to be. A church filled with adoration of your son, filled with worship. A church that has a community that's filled with love and accountability and care for one another.

God, we want to be on mission. We want the world to know that Jesus Christ is Lord. And we want them to know through our words and through our deeds. And so, would you do that, O God, by your spirit, through these ordinary means of grace, the preaching of your word, the communion table, all the elements of our worship.

Would you form us into your people and bless the world through us. In Jesus' name, amen. Amen. All right, so these past few weeks, we've been preaching through John's Gospel, right, with a focus on our church's mission.

[ 3 : 30 ] Christ's church exists to lead people into deeper relationships with Christ and His church through community for what? The city. Thank you. So, today we're on the fourth C.

The fourth and final C. What does it actually mean to have a deeper relationship with Christ for the city? You know, for me, growing up in the suburbs, I didn't have much of a vision for the city and definitely not an appreciation for it.

Actually, for a lot of us, you know, second and third generation Chinese Americans here in California, especially during like the 80s and the 90s, our parents and our grandparents worked super hard to move us out of the cities, out of San Francisco, out of Oakland, out of L.A. and into the suburbs for cleaner streets, less crime, more space, more parking, better schools, and way more Costco's, right? And that was like the narrative of my family.

My parents went to Oakland High, then after Cal and UCSF, they got out and they raised me in the suburbs of San Leandro, not too far away from here. My grandparents soon followed after them, moving into Alameda, and that's just what we did.

[ 4 : 36 ] We left the city. We left the urban centers, and we never really looked back. And honestly, I had a great suburban childhood. I love Costco, all right? My suburban, middle-class, Asian-American evangelical upbringing, it's something I'm super grateful for, and I wouldn't trade it for a different story.

It set me up well for college, where I found another Asian-American church and campus ministry to be a part of, and I just continued to grow. So by the time I graduated from UC Irvine, I was healthy, and I was happy, and I felt like I really had a solid foundation in so many ways.

I felt like I had my up and out down, up with God, in with His people, and out with the world. I was in the Word daily. I was in prayer daily. I was memorizing Scripture. I loved my church.

I was being discipled. I was making disciples. We were evangelizing, sharing our faith with people outside of the church. I was practicing all the piety that had been modeled for me from the beginning, and I thought I was doing all right.

And yet, toward the end of my time in Orange County, you know, even with all my spiritual disciplines and all this strong Christian community I had, I was beginning to feel like something was still seriously missing in the way I was practicing my Christian faith.

[ 5 : 49 ] Like, I remember thinking, well, is this all that Christianity is? Just go to church, practice spiritual disciplines, hang out with others who are trying to do the same, and then when we're not at church, just try to tell people about Jesus?

I remember starting to think, it all just felt too clean, too neat and tidy, too contained, even sterile.

And at the same time, I was also listening to a lot of Tim Keller, and he was preaching a Christianity that was far bigger than the individualistic personal piety that I had had.

He was preaching a God who was Lord over every square inch of creation, a Jesus whose life and lordship had profound implications for every sphere of culture and society.

And so, what I began to realize was that my faith, my suburban, college-educated, middle-class, Asian-American, evangelical faith, while it truly was a faith, an authentic and beautiful faith in its own way, I was coming to realize that at the same time, this faith of mine, it still hadn't significantly encountered or engaged with the dark depths of the world's brokenness.

Like, my faith was real, but also super sheltered and very inexperienced. It hadn't yet grasped the comprehensive scope and nature of Jesus' kingdom. And so, slowly, I came to realize that Jesus, he demanded not just faith in him as my personal savior, but a holistic faith in him as the savior of, like, the cosmos, right, of everything that is broken, both in my own life and soul, but also in the rest of creation.

[ 7 : 28 ] Christianity was meant to make a difference, not just for individual souls in eternity later, but also for whole societies, cultures, and communities now, as a sign of the kingdom of God, here and now.

So, during my last year or so in Orange County, I began to drive into the city of Santa Ana, which is, like, right in the center of Orange County, and Orange County is SoCal's, like, wealthiest county.

But, Santa Ana, in 2004, was named the most troubled and distressed city in the nation. So, I started driving into Santa Ana, serving meals with a group of people who were meeting at the Civic Center to serve the homeless.

Then I started collecting and passing out clothes, made some connections and contacts, and with a few friends, we were even able to help an immigrant man help him find a place to live for a few

months, get on his feet, find work, and just get into a place of some stability.

But, you know, the more I spent time out there, getting to know people, getting to hear their stories of addiction and family fractures and immigration struggles, trauma and abuse, mental health challenges, I increasingly discovered how raw and real the world was, how deep the brokenness can go, how much hurt and pain are out there, and how far back it reaches, right, into people's histories.

[ 8 : 50 ] But what also struck me was not simply the brokenness, but all the ways people were seeking to cope with the brokenness, seeking to remedy their pains and their plights, drugs, alcohol, unhealthy relationships.

But, you know, whatever it was that people were looking to to save themselves, the more I observed, the more I came to realize that what I was witnessing, it wasn't just, you know, people making bad, self-destructive decisions.

No, these were desperate people making flailing attempts to grab onto, to find, to secure really the same thing that we were after in the suburbs, the same thing as every human being.

What all these folks in Santa Ana were after, what every single one of us in this room is after is that thing, right, that thing that will finally bring about shalom and peace and restoration and wholeness. What we're looking for is salvation, and not just salvation from hell later on in the afterlife, but salvation from the hellish life that many of us are experiencing in the here and the now.

[ 10 : 02 ] That's what we're all reaching for, running to, living by that thing, right, that place, that practice that we believe will secure for us, or at least get us an inch or two closer to the shalom and the wellness that we're all after.

That the wholeness that Jesus calls the abundant life. But the question is, how's that going for those of us who are seeking it outside of Christ?

How's it going for us? Like, if we're all chasing wellness, and we still haven't secured it, what if we're looking in the wrong places, trusting the wrong things to make us whole?

And that's where we get into John chapter 5. Look with me at verse 1. Now, here in verse 1, it says that Jesus is heading into Jerusalem for a festival, right?

So imagine a city bursting at the seams with pilgrims flocking into the city from all over. And where's everyone going? They're going to the temple, to the center of the city, to the center of their culture, the place where God is supposed to dwell.

[ 11 : 03 ] And yet here, Jesus is one among tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, all on their way to the most holy place, the place of joy and celebration. But his first stop is to a place of ceremonial uncleanness, despair, and suffering.

Verse 2 tells us that of all the places he could have visited in Jerusalem, he goes to the Sheep Gate Pool at Bethesda, where the broken are. Verse 3, where a great number of disabled people were lying there, the blind, the lame, the paralyzed, some scholars estimate there could have been hundreds, maybe even thousands of people gathered at this pool.

But now why? What's so special about this place, this pool? Well, if you noticed in the NIV translation that's in your liturgies, there's no verse 4. Anyone notice that?

There's no verse 4. The King James Version has verse 4, but not the NIV. So what's that all about? Well, the reason the NIV doesn't include verse 4 is because the earliest, the best manuscripts of John's gospel don't actually include verse 4.

And it's highly likely that the later copies just added verse 4 to share the common belief of the time that an angel would stir the water at this pool and the first person in, they would be healed.

[ 12 : 24 ] Okay? Okay? So while this missing verse 4 probably wasn't part of what John originally wrote, it does reflect what people believed about this pool in the first century.

And we can see that in verse 7, right? This man clearly believes in the magical power of this pool. So try to picture the scene. Tens of thousands entering Jerusalem, all with their sights on the temple, many of them coming in through the Sheep Gate, which, by the way, was the closest city entrance, basically right next door to the temple.

In fact, it was called the Sheep Gate because this is where they brought the sheep in for the sacrifices into the temple. So here Jesus is, the Lamb of God, entering by the Sheep Gate.

And while tens of thousands of others would have just thoughtlessly just looked and walked past this unsightly Sheep Gate pool area with all these sick, lame, paralyzed people, eyes forward, just fixed on their temple destination, just minding their own business, right?

Keeping to themselves like they probably did every single year, being blind to the blind, letting these helpless and hopeless, lame, and paralyzed people become invisible to them. Jesus is not about to overlook the poor and the suffering on his way to commune with God at the temple.

[13:37] He's not that kind of a God. He's not that kind of a man. Jesus doesn't avert his gaze from the suffering of the city. No, when Jesus comes to the city, he comes to the whole city, the real city.

He stops at Santa Ana before he goes to Hollywood. He stops in the Tenderloin before he goes to the Golden Gate Bridge. And why? Because when Jesus sees the many lying by this pool, he doesn't just see the unlucky ones.

He doesn't just see the sad, suffering minority. And he also doesn't see, you know, just superstitious people undeserving of his help. Because look at how foolish they are for waiting upon this magic water to heal them.

How pathetic. No. His eyes and his heart are filled with compassion. And what he sees are thousands of people who are just wearily groping and grasping for anything, anything, even magical angel water.

Because that's how desperate they are in this city. Then, out of all these people, Jesus fixes his eyes on one man.

[14:43] Verse 5. One who was there had been an invalid for 38 years. And man, that's how old I am. I'm 38. That's my entire lifetime that he'd been sick.

That would have been more than the entirety of a lot of people's lives in antiquity. So, basically, this guy's been stuck for an ancient lifetime. Okay? Now, imagine how he'd spent those 38 years.

38 years of waking up and not getting better. 38 years of hoping but nothing changing. And who knows how many of those 38 years he spent here at this pool just by himself.

No one to help him in the water. Just him alone with his mat. Which, sure, that mat may have been a luxury item in this pool area. Yeah. Kept him from having to sleep directly on the ground.

Maybe provided a little bit extra comfort. A little extra dignity. Something to call his own in that miserable place. But what if the mat also reminded him of the seeming permanence of his state.

[15:42] And of how long he had been there. Day and night. Right? Night and day. Day in and day out. Can you imagine? Day in and day out. Day in and day out. So, again, Jesus learning, it says in verse 6.

How long this man had been suffering. Jesus approaches him and at first it seems like he asks this man like a really stupid question. Do you want to get well? Of course. Of course he does.

He's been waiting to get well for 38 years and he's so desperate to get well. He's been laying here on a mat for who knows how long with all these other sickly people. Of course he wants to get well. Why would Jesus ask this?

How could he not know the answer? Well, I think what Jesus is doing here is not so much trying to figure out whether or not this guy wants to be well. But I think he's trying to expose something. Diagnostically probe. Bring something to light within the man. Because look at the man's response in verse 7 to Jesus' question. One commentator describes it as the crotchety grumblings of an old man.

[16:42] It's like he doesn't even think Jesus' question is worth answering. Do I want to get well? Huh. Well, let me tell you the problem I have with getting well. Of course I want to get well, but I can't because no one cares to help me.

What do you think I'm doing here, man? I'm trying. I'm trying to get well, but I have no one to help me. And in fact, all these other people are not just not helping me, but they are pushing past me, rushing in ahead of me, cutting me in the line.

He's just so miserable, right? So jaded. Maybe he's lost faith in the prospect of getting well. After all, it's been 38 years. He's definitely lost faith in the kindness of others, right?

All he sees are people cutting him in line. And for decades, he hasn't found a single person to help him get into the water. A single person, right?

To help him get into this water, which honestly, maybe he doesn't even believe is going to actually heal him. Just his last-ditch effort, right? Who would want to spend a day helping a man do that, right?

[17:44] For 38 years, this guy had just witnessed people not thinking that he was worth their time. People not willing to wait around and be with all these other sickly, nasty people, right?

To help him just be superstitiously dipped into this hopefully magic water. Who would spend their time on that? Surely all of this contributed, right, to this man's cynicism.

It's just been so long, right? 13,870 days of not getting well. And also of not getting help. And probably after that long, you know, it's not uncommon to start managing your expectations, right? Maybe stop pursuing wellness because it hurts too much to hope. And maybe you just resign yourself to life at this pool, lying on this mat, angry at the world and just waiting to die.

38 years in a downward trend, it can slowly convince you that this is just your life now. So get used to it. And it's that. It's that attitude.

[ 18 : 47 ] It's that spirit that Jesus wants to expose and speak into when he asks, Do you want to get well? Oh, he cares about what this guy wants. He wants him to reimagine what he might want, what he might have.

And again, listen to how he answers, though. Sir, I have no one to help me into the pool. And when I try, someone else gets there first. Notice he never actually says, yes, I want to get well.

Rather, he explains how he thinks getting well works. He explains the thing, the thing he thinks might possibly bring him shalom and salvation. And what he's basically saying is, sir, I know how to get well.

I need to get into that water at just the right time. And before that, I need to get someone to help me into the water at just the right time.

That's how this works. That's how I'll be healed. In his mind, the problem isn't that he doesn't know the magic formula to get healed, but that he doesn't have the help to execute the formula. For him, it's a logistics problem.

[ 19 : 48 ] Without even answering Jesus' question, he's exposing what all his hopes have been placed upon, this magical angel water. And it's so funny because standing right in front of him is Jesus, the true healer, but he's missing him.

In just the chapter before, Jesus has just convinced the woman at the well that he had living water for her. Surely he had some for this man as well, right? Right? This man doesn't even think to ask Jesus for any kind of help.

It's just kind of like, well, I know the cure, but let me tell you the problem I'm having, accessing the cure. And man, aren't people so rotten? But little does this guy know who he's talking to.

He's just fixated on this water as his salvation and as his shalom. He has no idea. He's basically just suggested to the maker of heaven and earth, would you mind dipping me in the magical angel water?

To the creator of the universe. He's standing right in front of him and he asks for so little. He asks for so little.

[ 20 : 54 ] And he asks for something that won't even bring him health. Do we ask our God for too little as well? Well, my daughter, she just finished her second season of basketball.

And I promised her I would give her \$1,000 if she made a basket. I didn't believe. And it also shows my values, right? I said, I'll give you \$1,000 if you make a basket.

And she said, well, can I have two bobas instead? I said, okay. And she made a lot of baskets, so I'm glad. But do you see yourself in my daughter?

In this man? And the point is, not that I'm like Jesus, all right? But do you see yourself asking so little of this God? It's almost infuriating how this guy speaks to Jesus.

He's so clueless. And yet Jesus is so kind. And his response is so striking. He refuses to play along. He's not about to affirm the man's faith in the magical angel water, but he also doesn't rebuke his superstition or correct his theology.

[ 22 : 01 ] He doesn't even say you're looking for wellness in all the wrong places. He simply looks at this man with compassion and authority at the same time.

And he issues a healing command. Get up. Pick up your mat. And walk. While this man was asking for help to access the cure he thought he needed, Jesus refused to help him access that cure.

Jesus didn't come to help him get into the water. He came to show him that he never needed the water in the first place. Jesus doesn't come into our lives helping us access the false and futile cures we think we need.

No, he comes to give us the real thing. To give us himself. To liberate us, right? From our slavery. Our slavery to all these things and places and practices that we think will bring us abundant life.

Jesus is showing us here that health and healing don't come from a certain place or practice, but from a person. God himself. God with us.

[ 23 : 07 ] God with us. But here's the thing. This wasn't just a lesson for the man at the pool. The man at the pool isn't the only one in the city trying to plug into the right system to secure his own shalom.

It's not just the unclean ones, but also the clean ones. So verse 9 says that Jesus' command authoritatively heals this guy and he takes up his mat and walks. And this happens on the Sabbath. Verse 10. And so the Jewish leader said to the man who had been healed, It is the Sabbath. The law forbids you to carry your mat. Like, instead of, praise God, you're healed. This is amazing. We're so happy for you. It's shame, right?

They can't see the amazing thing that's happened in this guy's life, but only that the Sabbath was being broken, at least in their eyes. But honestly, the Sabbath wasn't even being broken. The Sabbath command in Scripture was about resting from production, resting from your normal labor and economic activity.

It didn't prohibit simply carrying a mat. In the Old Testament, there was a command against gathering wood and carrying burdens on the Sabbath, but it didn't forbid carrying mats. No, it wasn't even a prohibition against carrying things so much as turning the Sabbath into a business day.

[ 24 : 12 ] It was a prohibition against trusting my own work over God's work for me. Trusting God's provision for me. But see, over time, these Jewish leaders had built a whole system of extra rules to be followed because just like the invalid man, in their minds they had their own idea of what would bring shalom and salvation to their nation.

While the invalid thought he needed the stirred up magical pool of water to be saved, the Jewish leaders here thought they needed strict moralistic practices in order to be saved.

And this is why they were so legalistic and so quick to police people's behavior. It wasn't just about broken rules to them. For them, each violation of their rules was a threat to their nation's righteousness and worthiness to receive a Messiah.

So do you see a similarity? Here in the city of Jerusalem, whether at the pool of Bethesda by the sheep gate or even the halls of the temple itself, the invalid man had his way of getting well. He had his own way. And the Jewish leaders had their own way of getting well. Sure, they were looking in different places and for different practices, but they were essentially pursuing the same thing.

[ 25 : 25 ] Security, shalom, salvation, apart from the true source. Apart from the Savior. And this wasn't unique to Jerusalem. This is every city. This is our city.

This is the Bay Area. Because, like, we may not be lying by pools, and we may not be policing Sabbath laws to transform our nation, but we definitely have our own ways of trying to take control of our own destinies.

Our own ways of trying to secure wellness for ourselves apart from God. For some of you, it's if I can just secure that relationship with my high school, my middle school crush, right?

Or if I can just find love or get this relationship to work out. If I can find someone to desire me, adore me, then I'll finally be whole. You're trying to dip yourself in the pool of romance and intimacy.

Or for others, you're trying to dip yourselves in the pools of wealth and status and success. If I can just get to this point in my career, if I can just get to that number in my retirement fund, then I'll feel secure.

[ 26 : 30 ] Then others of us are just like the Jewish leaders here, right? Maybe we're just like them. We find ourselves, like, subconsciously haunted by a Santa Claus-like version of God who knows if we've been good or bad, so be good for goodness sake, right?

Maybe that's why you're here. Because you're thinking, I gotta get back to church, just say enough prayers, just get spiritual enough, just be obedient enough, just get consistent enough in my personal piety, and then God will come through for me.

And my life will go the way I finally want it to go. But do you see the pattern? In the invalid? In the Jewish leaders? In your own hearts?

In your own life? Sure, maybe, again, it's different places we look to, different practices we employ, but at the end of the day, it's all the same strategy of self-salvation. Self-securing shalom.

The question is whether or not we will notice it in our lives. Like, if it's not a magic pool or some moralistic practice, what's that thing for you?

[ 27 : 33 ] That thing you keep going back to, believing that this will finally make you well and full of abundant life apart from God. To give you a window into what this is for me, and like what I've been working through and processing with God and confessing to the people in my life who keep me accountable, for me, it's this constant feeling that I need to be working in order to live a fruitful life and in order to control my future.

Like, I so often operate as if, man, if I can just get everything dialed in, my routines, my fitness and dietary habits, my family rhythms, my finances, my spiritual practices.

If I can do this many push-ups and pull-ups each day, right? Keep my weight at this number.

Increase my VO2 max, right? Count my calories. Get my macros right.

Train my daughters to thrive in academics and sports and music and scripture memory and social skills. And if I can fine-tune my retirement portfolio, make sure I have just enough exposure to Bitcoin, right?

If I can read and memorize and meditate all the scripture, pray for that many minutes each day, and then on top of all that, if I can just keep up with everything, what's happening in the world, what's changing, what's coming next, then hopefully I won't fall behind.

[ 28 : 54 ] And I'll finally feel like things are gonna be okay, like I've secured my future and like I'm in control, or at least in as much control as I can be. And then and only then will I know that I'm a good and faithful pastor, dad, husband, human being.

If I just commit to constantly sharpening myself, optimizing my life, leveling up 24-7, then and only then will I be worthy enough to hear the words, well done, good and faithful.

But the truth is, this is an exhausting way to live. Because I'm never quite there, never optimized enough, never disciplined enough.

And not only that, but living this way has made me a more hurried, anxious, and impatient person. Chelsea will tell you I'm miserable when I'm in this mode. More self-centered, less loving, less present, less able to enjoy the gifts that God places in my lap, like the gift of the Sabbath.

Man, this is the hardest commandment for me to observe. I just find it so tempting to use that day to pick up more sticks, right? I want to pick up more sticks.

[ 30 : 10 ] I want to have more by the end of the week and more at the end of my life, more sticks.

That's what I want. So really, it's timely that my sabbatical is coming up. And I hope you'll pray for me as I figure out how to embrace the spirit of Sabbath.

But you know, even with that, people have been asking how to pray for me in my Sabbath, and I've been praying, can you pray that I won't waste my sabbatical? But you see, even the idea of not wasting it, right?

The sentiment still has the idol of optimization looming largely over it. So man, as you can tell, I'm still very much a work in progress. But overall, God's been gently reminding me again and again that I need not be a frantic branch trying to plug myself into all kinds of different vines, right, in order to manufacture all the kinds of artificial fruit I want to see in my life.

No. There's only one true vine. It's Jesus. Jesus. And His yoke is easy. His burden is light.

So why in the world would we try so hard to find alternative vines to the true divine vine who loved us and gave Himself for us?

[ 31 : 32 ] The one who doesn't ask us to break our backs to bear fruit, but promises to do that work in us if we just abide in Him? Every other vine, every other vine is merely a block of wood, good only to be burned in the fire.

And trying to connect myself to these blocks of wood is no different from the invalid man asking the maker of heaven and earth to dip in the magic angel water.

So what if we actually believed that Jesus is the vine? That He's the living water? And He's the living water who comes to us.

And just like He did for this invalid man, what if we believe that He wants to speak words of power and life into us to bear fruit in us? You know, when Jesus spoke so authoritatively into this man's life, everything changed in his life.

Everything changed. But what the Jewish leaders, all that they could see was a broken role. They couldn't see His liberation.

[ 32 : 50 ] They couldn't see His joy. All the Jewish leaders could see was a threat to their anxious, scrupulous way of life. The way of life that they were going to commit to, so sure of the shalom that was going to come by their works rather than by grace through faith.

And when they found out that Jesus had healed this man on the Sabbath, verse 16 says they went after Him. But what's interesting is Jesus doesn't open up the Torah and demonstrate to them that He actually technically had not violated the Sabbath.

No, actually, He admits that He was indeed working. He says in verse 17, My Father is always at work and I too am working.

Do you see what He was claiming? It says it in verse 18. The Jewish leaders surely knew what He was saying. He was saying, Of course I healed on the Sabbath. I'm doing the work of God. I am God. And that's why they wanted to kill Him.

Because if that was true, then their whole vision, what they had devoted all their lives to, their whole vision for their city and for shalom, was about to fall apart. Jesus was confronting them with the truth that they weren't the ones to bring about their own shalom.

[ 34 : 00 ] And neither are we. we cannot be the hope of the world. If we are, the world is in trouble. And that's an indictment upon every hustling and bustling city that has ever existed on planet Earth, no doubt here in the Bay Area, every urban center.

Yes, with our shiny temples and also our sad pools by the Sheep Gate cities full of all kinds of people doing the same thing, though. frantically trying to fix ourselves, fix our lives, fix our world through technique after technique after technique, ever trying to gain control over the cosmos but only ever coming up short and exhausted.

This is what I saw in Santa Ana. It's what we're seeing here in John chapter 5 in Jerusalem, in the invalid, in the Jewish leaders, and it's what we see in our own cities. Again, different places, different practices, but the same failing strategy, trying to secure shalom through technique but never arriving.

But what if this bad news that we can't bring about our own shalom is actually the best news? My Father is always working and I too, says Jesus.

That's the gospel. That's the gospel. That if God is always at work, then the healing of your life the healing of our cities, they don't ultimately rest on us but on the one who is both the ever-working God and yet at the very same time the never hurried, never surprised, always at rest God.

[ 35 : 34 ] This is the gospel. That this ever-working, ever-resting God has come to make all our strivings cease in Christ. And having completed the most toilsome, the most painstaking work of all time upon the cross, He has proclaimed once and for all.

What? It is finished. No need to dip ourselves in magic pools. No need to police perfect piety into our societies to make us a worthy society of a Messiah to change all things.

No, the work is finished in Christ so that as His people, as His church, as His bride, we don't have to work. We don't work to secure our shalom.

We don't work to save our cities because we can't. But thanks be to God that He is always at work so that we can always be at rest. And from that place of rest, as we await the day when He will come and establish His holy city on earth, in the meantime, we can step into every city from Berkeley and throughout the bay and beyond, simply walking in the good works, our always-working Father has already prepared for us, His children, to do.

Not in order to fix everything, but bearing witness to the one who can and who will. This is what it means to cultivate a deeper relationship with Christ, the vine, bearing fruit for the city as a church.

[ 37 : 00 ] We embody and tell a better story, offering a better Savior to those who are grasping and groping in the dark for whatever equivalent magical angel, water, or false gods that cannot save them, that do not love them, that have not died for them.

We reach them. We bear witness to them in word and deed, a sign of the kingdom of God. We've been doing that here for 20 years. We plan to do it for many more.

So Christ Church, let this be our good news. As we look to celebrate 20 years as a church, let this be our good news that long before we arrived here in Berkeley, our God was always at work.

He was always working. Before us, He will continue working after us. He was always working. Even to death on a cross, He was working. And He'll continue to do so with or without us.

But Lord, please, let it be with us. Let it be here in our church, in our city.

[ 38 : 06 ] Let it be with us as we rest and work to the glory of Your Son for the good of the city. Lord, convince us that this is the cure for every city, the gospel.

And send us out to share it and display it in word and deed for Your sake and for the city. Amen. Amen. Amen.