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 thirty-eight 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?” “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. – John 5:1-13, NIV

This morning, we are continuing our sermon series called *Get up!* We are focusing on five stories from the Bible in which Jesus, or a messenger from God, tells someone to *get up.* Today’s story is about a time when someone misses the point after Jesus has told another person to *get up.* So, what does it mean to *miss the point?* Next week we will be watching the Super Bowl with the Chiefs playing the 49ers. Here’s a picture of the kicker for the Chiefs. His name is Harrison Butker. I’ve shared with some of you that Harrison attended the same high school as our daughters, and I actually had the privilege of carpooling Harrison in the back of our minivan when he was a 9th grader and was much shorter than he is today. I am hoping that Harrison will have many opportunities to make the point after the touchdown in the Super Bowl. But, I found this picture of a time when Harrison actually missed a point after. So, I hope I didn’t just jinx him. However, that is *not* what we are talking about today when it comes to “missing the point.”

Missing the point occurs when something flies right past us. We don't catch what's really taking place. Have you ever had something like that happen to you? I remember one time I was giving the children’s sermon in another church. It was the season of Lent. Traditionally, Lent is the time for Christians to reflect on their sins and to seek God's forgiveness. So, with the children I decided to take a lint brush and talk about how we can use a lint brush to get the lint off of our clothing. I then began talking about the season of Lent as a time to get rid of those things in life we don't want. And as I spoke, I began to hear laughter from the congregation. I was a little puzzled as to why they were laughing -- until finally it dawned on me that they were laughing with the idea of using a “lint” (L-I-N-T) brush to illustrate what we do during the season of Lent (L-E-N-T). Everyone was in on the joke except for me. I had missed the point.
Sometimes this even happens to people in the stories from the Bible. Sometimes it’s the duh-disciples who miss the point. Other times it may be the religious leaders of the day, such as the Pharisees. I believe that’s what's going on in our story today from the gospel of John. It is a story in which Jesus tell someone to “get” up and some of the religious leaders who hear about it simply miss the point.

In our story today, Jesus is in Jerusalem for one of the Jewish festivals. There is a gate called the Sheep Gate, and near to it is a pool called Bethesda. When I visited Jerusalem a few years ago, I saw both of these. The pool was covered by five colonnades. There many people who were disabled used to wait -- people who could not see or who could not walk. They waited there believing that if the water was troubled or moved, that was caused by an angel from God, and the first person into the water after that would be healed.

Jesus sees one man lying there and Jesus learns he had been there for 38 years waiting for healing. So, Jesus asks him, “So you want to get well?” The man explains to Jesus that he has no one to help him get in the water when it's stirred -- someone always gets there before him. Then Jesus tells him to, “Get up! Pick up your mat and walk.” And at once, the man is healed and he gets up and he is off.

In telling this story, John notes that this was the Sabbath on which all of this took place. Then John introduces us to the Jewish leaders who have somehow seen this or become aware of it. They tell the man who’s been healed, “It is the Sabbath, the law forbids you to carry your mat.” And the man who was healed replies, “The man who made me well said to me, ‘Pick up your mat and walk.’” Then the Jewish leaders say, “Who is this fellow who told you to pick it up and walk?” The man says he has no idea who it was. John adds that Jesus had slipped away into the crowd.

This is an amazing story. The man who had been unable to get up and walk for 38 years is healed instantly by two words Jesus spoke: “Get up!” Now that would seem to be enough to grab anyone’s attention. But the Jewish leaders do not focus on that. Instead, they focus on the fact that the healing took place on the Sabbath. According to the Ten Commandments, people are to remember the Sabbath and keep it holy, which meant the people of Israel were to set aside one day and not do their usual work. It was a time set apart to rest and to worship God. Sabbath went all the way back to the book of Genesis and the creation story, which tells us even God takes a day off once a week to rest. But over the years, in order to try to help the Jewish people understand what was and was not work, they had created 39 rules that defined the kind of work one could or could not do on the Sabbath. And picking up one’s mat and walking was defined as work.

Now the obvious point here is that the man by the pool who could not walk was not in the business of picking up his mat and walking as his line of work. So, the Jewish leaders miss the point by focusing on the breaking of their interpretations of Sabbath, rather than on the amazing event they have just heard about -- a man was healed by Jesus! They simply miss the point!

When I was studying in preparation for this sermon, I was reading a commentary that actually referred to these Jewish leaders as “elders.” The commentator said that according to the tradition
of the elders the man was breaking the law. (D.A. Carson) According to the tradition of the elders -- that phrase caught my attention because today we are both recognizing our elders who are rotating off the session, as well as installing and ordaining a new class of elders. So, what is it in this passage about getting up that our elders need to glean -- as well as the rest of us who are followers of Christ? I think it has to do with missing the point. Don't miss the point!

We’ve probably all had an experience when it seems like someone missed the point. One experience that comes to mind may be something some of us have had happen to us. Have you ever had a time when you happened to do very well on something like a report card? Maybe you even got all A’s and one B. (Now I realize that may be a stretch for some of us, but go with me on this one.) You take it home to show it to mom or dad, and what’s the first thing they say, “Why did you get a B?” Now, I’m not going ask how many of us have had that happen to us, or how many of us have said that to someone else, but my guess is that we’ve all had a similar experience. We miss the point and we focus on the one shortcoming. We simply miss the point.

In our story today, the Jewish leaders, the elders, missed the point. Jesus healed a man who had been unable to walk for 38 years! But the Jewish elders focused on their belief that a rule had been broken -- which also missed the point of Sabbath. Sabbath was to be a time of worship and rest and renewal, not about keeping an obscure set of rules that actually worked against the real purpose of Sabbath.

So, to our elders-elect, as well as to all of those who have served and are serving as elders, and even to any of us who would be followers of Christ, the message is simple: don't miss the point. Focus on the main thing. In this story, the main thing was Jesus healing a man and bringing wholeness to his life. Jesus healed - everything else is secondary.

Jeff Arnold, one of our church members, shared with me this week a selection from the book his Friday morning Men’s group is reading. It tells a story about Karl Barth, the great 20th century German theologian. Barth found a helpful parallel between the modern church and the story of Jesus and his disciples in the boat during the storm. You may remember the story – a storm comes up while Jesus and the disciples are out in the boat. Jesus is asleep in the back of the small boat and has to be awoken. He calms the storm and seems surprised the disciples are so afraid. Barth notes that Jesus sleeps while the disciples panic. Barth believes that the boat is a metaphor for the church. The boat is rocked and reeled, but it's not going down because Jesus is with them. Barth goes on to say, “The storm is too violent… But He [Jesus] is in the ship, and for this reason, if for this reason alone, it cannot go down.” The author then comments, “In other words, our biggest need is to keep our focus on Jesus.”

So, when we face the storms and the challenges of life, as scary and as overwhelming as they may seem -- as Christians we can choose to keep our focus on Jesus. And if we choose not to do that, we may miss the point -- the point being Jesus. And that is what I want to say to our elders-elect, to all of our other elders still serving on the session, and to all the members of our church family -- don't miss the point! Keep your focus on Jesus, because while we may be tempted to panic in the midst of a storm, Jesus remains calm and will see us through.
This week I wrote in my *Reflections* blog that we had our monthly called session meeting this past Monday. This is the time of year that we try to finish up our ministry and mission budget for the coming year. We had a very strong giving year in 2019. We noted that most months our giving exceeded our needs. That was the result of your generous giving and some special gifts at the start of the year totaling about $80,000 that some of our members gave above and beyond their normal pledge, just so that we could do all God called us to do this past year.

In 2020, our pledges, while strong, are still less than what we need to do all of God’s work in the coming year through JCPC. However, your session wrestled well with this on Monday. Often budget meetings like this can be very difficult. And while there was some initial uneasiness about the situation, once our elders understood the context, they began to energetically and creatively discuss the best options to move forward. This included a plan to share this information with you, the congregation, in the coming weeks -- both by letter and an announcement in worship by some of our elders. But throughout our discussion, I was impressed with how they stayed *focused* on what was most important – which was doing what God is calling us to do to minister to others in the name of Christ in 2020. They did not miss the point! And they did it in a way that did not fall into the trap of shame and blame. We all focused on working together on the same side to discern where God is leading us. I hope you will keep our elders and our staff in your prayers as we seek to reduce what we can and find new ways to increase our giving.

Friends, remember that we worship a Christ who can tell a man who has been unable to walk for 38 years, “Get up!” and the man is healed. We worship a Christ who, in the middle of a storm in a tiny boat out on the water, can sleep calmly because he is the one, the *only* one, who can calm the storms of life. We worship a God who desires that we not miss the point. So, don’t miss the point! Stay focused on Jesus and he will see us through whatever we face in life.

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