



# JUSTICE, PEACE AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION



## STANDING AT THE POOL OF APATHY

Carolyn D. Townes, OFS, National JPIC Animator

As I was praying about what to share with you, the Spirit whispered the story of the infirm man in the fifth chapter of John's Gospel. He had been infirm for 38 years and sat at the pool of Bethesda waiting for someone to put him in when the angel came to stir the waters. Jesus simply asks the man a question. "Do you really want to get well?" I mean, 38 years? By now, he could have wiggled his way down to that pool. Instead of answering the question, he made excuses. He placed his blessings in the hands of someone else; as if it had nothing to do with him.

So, my brothers and sisters, are you sitting at the pool waiting? You say you are a Christian. You say you are a Franciscan. You say you have faith and trust in our merciful God. Then, why are you sitting at the pool waiting for someone else to do what God has called you to do? If our Lord came to you and asked if you were serious about serving him, what would your answer be? Would you make excuses like the infirm man at the pool? It is so easy to blame the next person because he or she did not do his or her part. It is so easy to pass the buck and not take responsibility for what is ours to do. Our Seraphic Father Francis prayed, May the Lord show us what is ours to do; not what is ours to avoid or what is ours to pass by and let someone else do.

Where in your life are you making excuses for not doing what is yours to do? Being a follower of Jesus and Francis is living a nonviolent, merciful life. This, I believe, is the bare minimum. We are called to show compassion and mercy to all those we come in contact with – whether we think they deserve it or not. We are also called to show mercy and compassion to our Sister Mother Earth. That means caring for creation and treating this global home of ours with love and respect. In *Laudato Si*, Pope Francis writes: "The human environment and the natural environment deteriorates together; we cannot adequately combat environmental degradation unless we attend to causes related to human and social degradation." Are you caring for creation or are you making excuses –

blaming it on the government, big corporations, or your next door neighbor? What is yours to do? Are you doing what is yours to do? Or, are you standing at the pool of apathy and complacency?

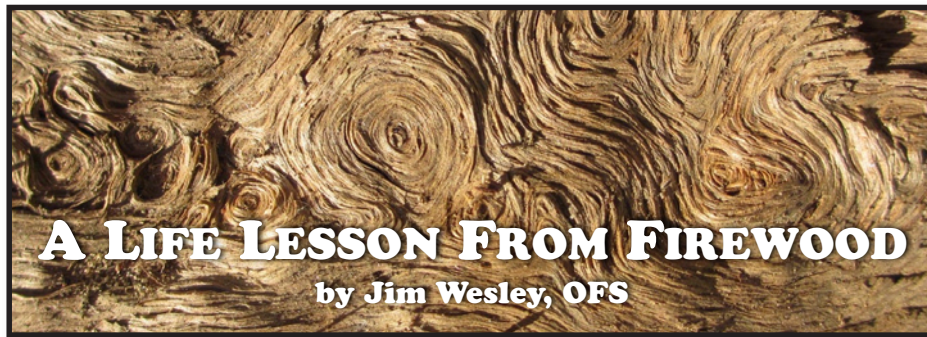
Just like the infirm man, you have been equipped with whatever you need to do what God has called you to do. But are you serious about living out that call? Do you really want to follow Jesus and do what is yours to do? Are you contributing to the violence in our world? Are you gossiping about someone in your church or fraternity? When the waters are stirred up, do you mobilize your fraternity members to work for justice? Or, are you waiting for someone to come along and do it for you?

This year's Ecumenical Advocacy Days in Washington, D.C., was entitled "Lift Every Voice! Racism, Class and Power" and in the program it was stated: "In this country, communities of color are under siege: named and unnamed black lives are killed each year by police; immigrants are detained and scapegoated; and public displays of discontent and calls for solidarity have too often been met with disregard, suppression or violence."

Are you standing at the pool of apathy – disregard, suppression, or violence? I hear so often, "I will continue to pray!" And yes, prayer is the first step, but it isn't the only step. Prayer should move your feet to action. Don't ask God to guide your steps if you are not willing to move your feet! Taking one small step is still a step. Action breeds momentum. Your one small step can be to notice where you are gossiping during the day; to notice when you are referring to "them" or "those people" instead of brothers and sisters; or to notice your language of separation and division as opposed to language of unity and inquiry. Do you bad-mouth presidential candidates or other public figures, especially on social media? Is that the Franciscan stance to take? How are you setting yourself apart from those who are speaking violence?

My challenge for us all: Watch as well as pray! Watch where you use language of violence, disregard and apathy. Pray that the Holy Spirit will replace this language with language of compassion and mercy. Then, take one small step to act on that compassion and mercy – be it towards a person or the environment. Replace “third world country” with “under-developed country.” God made one world and we are called to care for this one world. So let us do it with compassion, empathy and mercy. May the Lord give you His peace.

**Animatee**  
**Peace**  
**Nonviolence**  
**Compassion**  
**Empathy**  
**Love**  
**Franciscan**  
**Creation**  
**Prayer**  
**Justice**  
**Season**  
**Feast**  
**Francis**  
**Lent**  
**Fast**  
**Listen**  
**Jesus**



I am always humbled by the lessons that can be learned by simply paying attention to the natural world around us. One day while stacking firewood, I picked up a piece of oak and while getting ready to put it in the wood shed, I noticed some imperfections in the wood’s grain. Instead of the normal straight grain, there were swirls, twists, and concentric rings. As I admired the imperfect wood grain pattern, I wondered what the pattern was like throughout the piece of wood, if this unique pattern was visible on the outside.

So it was off to my workshop.

After cutting the wood into strips 3/8 inch thick by two inches wide, I realized that, with each pass of the saw, I was exposing the extraordinary hidden beauty within the chunk of wood, another example of the hand of God, ever-present in creation.

With the help of the internet, I learned that as the oak tree grows it receives light from the sun, nutrients from the soil and rain from the atmosphere – the essential requirements for normal, healthy growth. But like all living things, trees also experience stress. In the case of an oak tree, this could be in the form of fungal growth or insect damage. When this occurs, the wood fibers respond to the stress and arrange themselves in a kaleidoscope of twists, swirls, and knots. This beautiful natural phenomenon is known as an oak burl, and this "wild grain" makes burl wood extremely dense and resistant to splitting.



This Tau Cross, the symbol of Franciscans and the official habit of the Secular Franciscan Order, was fashioned from the wood of an oak burl. When wearing this, I am reminded that stress is a part of life, and that with the help of God, the fiber of my being can be transformed in a way I could never imagine.

Think about it! Imperfections resulting from dealing with stress can ultimately be the source of strength and great beauty.

*Even in the worst situation in life, God waits for me, God wants to embrace me, God expects me.*  
 Pope Francis