

Sermon for Sunday, April 14, 2024

Acts 3:1-10

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all of our hearts be acceptable to you Oh Lord, our rock and our redeemer. Amen.

The book of Acts is commonly known as *The Acts of the Apostles* but it would have been far better if its title was *The Acts of the Holy Spirit* for this book tells many stories of how the Holy Spirit filled believers in Jesus in those first days and years after he ascended to heaven. It goes on to detail how those early followers testified about Jesus, about his death and resurrection, his saving power and how they were able to provide healing to the afflicted through the power of that Spirit. The Acts is a book of stories.

Today's reading is one of those stories: the story of how a man with a birth defect preventing him from walking is healed. We are going to think about this Scripture reading from two perspectives; first from the perspective of Peter and John and then (more briefly) from the perspective of the lame man. As a conclusion I'm going to draw you into reflecting on how this story might inform our faith and encourage us on our life journeys.

Peter and John are part of the inner circle of Jesus' disciples. They, more than most of the other disciples, had received the most intensive tutoring from Jesus during his time on earth. Today's reading occurs after Pentecost—so it is safe to assume that both of these men had received the gift of the Holy Spirit. Not only that, both of these men had witnessed how the Spirit was given to untold numbers in the crowd that day. The Spirit wasn't just given to the disciples by virtue of their training as close followers of Jesus; she was granted(given) to many others who believed but hadn't been trained as deeply as they.

One of the lovely aspects of today's reading is that Peter and John didn't set out to this prayer service with an intentional plan that they were going to talk about Jesus. They weren't going out to evangelize and "bring people to Christ." They hadn't organized a mission trip to "go help people." This day was just a regular day and on this particular regular day Peter and John went to the Temple to pray at an appointed prayer time.

When they go they are asked for alms; for a gift of money by a man who has been unable to walk for his entire life. (We learn in the next chapter that he is more than 40 years old.) Being unable

to walk means that he is unable to perform typical types of labor that would be expected of common laborers in that day. That's a fancy way of saying that he cannot support himself. For 40 years he has been forced to beg in order to earn something to live on.

The early Christians lived in community and shared their resources with each other. We have verses affirming this in chapter two and four. Peter says to the man that he has no money, and that might certainly be true, but he probably could have acquired some. I'm thinking that Peter was moved by the Holy Spirit to speak about healing the man. This is the first recorded healing in the book of Acts.

Note that Peter did not require that the lame man confess belief in Jesus before offering him healing. It was Peter's belief in Christ that effected the healing. A few verses further on in this chapter Peter says "And by faith in [Jesus'] name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you." In this particular scene healing is transmitted to the lame man through Peter's faith in Jesus not through the man's faith. So Peter plays an important role in this healing.

The second way to consider this story is from the perspective of the lame man. The lame man was placed outside of the Temple, not inside. We can speculate about why. It might be that it was considered inappropriate for him to ask for alms within the Temple walls. It might also be that since he was lame he was not allowed inside.

This lame man had lived for 40 years quite dependent on others for his sustenance. 40 years! So long that healing was probably quite beyond his ability to imagine. However, when healed the lame man enters the temple, walking and leaping and praising God. He gave the Lord all the credit—as did Peter. He knew where his healing had come from and he knew that God was the one to praise.

So what shall we do with this passage? What can we learn? How might it make a difference in our lives?

One way to think about this passage is to recognize that we sit here this morning, as insiders. We are inside a church sanctuary. Figuratively speaking we are inside the Temple. Do we dare to believe that by including others, especially those we see as outsiders, in the community of faith we too can offer healing to

them? Like the early disciples might we dare to view ourselves as people who can offer healing?

Peter, the Rock of the church, took the lame man by the right hand and lifted him up. Peter was just an uneducated fisherman yet he stopped, looked the lame man in the eye and gave him the gift of healing: a gift that it was likely was beyond the man's imagination.

Now, what about you? Are you able to extend your hand, lift someone else up, and escort them into the worshiping community? Are you ready to help them celebrate that they are included in the body of Christ by grace instead of by their own will alone?

I am not proposing that we should become faith healers that bring about physical healing. Physical and in some cases mental healing fall under the purview of trained medical professionals. But there are many other types of healing that we can initiate. Examples include the healing that comes from acknowledging the forgiveness of sins as provided by God, assisting others to lose their mental and emotional burdens, and the spiritual healing that is imparted when we emphasize the loving nature of God. Loving inclusion is an important tool that will bring about healing and it is a tool that we can use. Jesus knew this. He talked about it often with his disciples. I cannot emphasize this point strongly enough, "The inclusion of outsiders stands in continuity with the ministries of Jesus and of the apostles." We are called to open our doors and include those who stand (or sit) outside. We are called to open our doors and remove the barriers that keep others from receiving the healing that Jesus provides.

On another note I would add this question. Are you willing for this healing to take time? My spiritual director brought a quote to my attention this week. The quote comes from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit priest who wrote, "Above all, **trust in the slow work of God**. We are quite naturally impatient in everything to reach the end without delay. We should like to skip the intermediate stages. We are impatient of being on the way to something unknown, something new. And yet, it is the law of all progress that it is made by passing through some stages of instability—and that it may take a very long time... **Give our Lord the benefit of believing that his hand is leading you**, and accept the anxiety of feeling yourself in suspense and incomplete."

- **Trust in the slow work of God.**

- Never doubt that God is at work in you and that God is effecting change within you, but that it may be slow....very slow.

- Never doubt that God is at work in the one to whom you are extending your hand and that God is effecting change within them, but that it may be slow....very slow.

- **Recognize that there will be periods of instability.**

- Making a major lifestyle change will feel deeply unsettling. Expect it and understand that the **dis-ease** that you feel is natural.
- The same will be true for the one you are trying to help.

- **Give our Lord the benefit** of believing that his hand is leading you.

- **Give our Lord the benefit** of believing that his hand is leading them just as that hand is leading you.

You are disciples of Jesus. You were given the gift of the Holy Spirit in your baptism. In the name of Jesus you have the power to extend your hand to help others and today's Scripture reading encourages us to do exactly that. Let it be so dear Lord, let it be so. May we be empowered to extend our hands often and for the healing of others. Amen.