

Acts 3:16 <sup>16</sup>And his name — by faith in his name — has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all

Our first lesson today reminds me of two old sayings: One is, “Give a man a fish and he eats for a day; teach a man to fish and he can eat for a lifetime.” The other is: “You can have all the money in the world, but if you don’t have your health, it won’t do you much good.”

If you backtrack a few verses, you will see that the man who is being talked about by Peter was just a short while ago sitting by the gate called Beautiful asking for alms. You can picture the scene, especially if you’ve been in any big city. There are always people some with physical or emotional issues asking for money as you walk by on the street. This would not only have been commonplace in Biblical times, but it would also have been necessary. They didn’t have the social service agencies or government assistance that we are accustomed to in our country. They depended on the mercy of those who passed by.

And of course, the interesting part of this Biblical account is that, when the man asks for help, Peter tells him that he and John don’t have any money to give, but they will give him something else. And then they speak these powerful words: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise and walk.” If you were looking at the scene in the most simplistic form you might think, “What a shame. Peter and John were so poor they couldn’t even help a beggar.” But on deeper reflection you see how very rich they were – they had the power of the risen Christ at their disposal. If they had money to give, well that would have helped that man very temporarily. But with this miracle, he now had the ability to earn his own living. He would no longer have to live off the sporadic generosity of others but now could have some control over his own life and livelihood. It was like teaching him to fish rather than giving him his fish. He asked for money, but he got so much more – he got his health. And he reacts with the joy that you would expect. Scripture says that he not only began walking, but he was also leaping and praising God.

I think there are at least 3 important things for us to glean from this lesson:

First of all, we learn that with Jesus we get so much more than we expect. This man was only expecting a small monetary offering from Peter and John, something to last him a day or two or so. He never expected that he would get his health back. No wonder he didn’t just stand up and go on his way, but he leaped up to his feet, excitedly praising God, hugging the men who had brought him this miraculous gift.

Some people come to Jesus and think that they will get an answer to a particular prayer or the assurance that they will get to go to heaven. But of course, they get so much more. When our lives are touched by Jesus, we get forgiveness for today, the burden of guilt lifted from our shoulders, the opportunity for restored relationships, freedom from the bondage to sinful behaviors, greater meaning in life, the comfort and guidance of the Holy Spirit... I could go on and on. Sometimes we have a very narrow scope of what we want or expect from Jesus, but our God’s love is so broad and so deep and so expansive that he does not just answer prayer requests, but he gives life both physically and spiritually.

Secondly, we learn that Jesus' name has power. Jesus told us this very fact as he ministered during his earthly life – “Whatever you ask in my name,” he said, “will be done for you.” And we know that one day at the name of Jesus every knee will bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth. And we see in this lesson how that powerful name of Jesus, spoken on behalf of this lame man, brought both healing of his body and faith to his soul. Jesus' name has power because Jesus has power. He is the one who conquered death and the grave – if he could break the bonds of sin and death, he can do anything. And so, we speak our prayers in the powerful name of Jesus asking always that his will be done, trusting that he knows just what we need, and he will provide.

Finally, we learn that God wants us to see and touch his miraculous presence not only as a benefit for our own lives, but as a witness to the world. In the gospel lesson Jesus says that his name is to be proclaimed to all the world, beginning in Jerusalem. In other words, start right where you are in your home, your community, your workplace – start with the people we know and then take that message to the ends of the earth. It shouldn't be as hard as we sometimes make it. I'm a grandma, and if anyone gives any indication that they are even slightly interested in my grandchildren I will tell them all the wonderful things that they do and share every picture I have of them from the time of birth until now – they bring me such joy I'm sure that everyone will see how wonderful they are. Shouldn't I at least be this excited, this filled with joy at the good news of Jesus Christ? It doesn't have to be a long or complicated story, not even the length of a sermon. We simply have to tell what Jesus has done, how he has conquered death, how he lives among us now, how he heals and restores all manner of people to new life. If we have some scripture memorized, all well and good, but we don't need to have a lot of knowledge to share what we have experienced, that in Christ we have received new life and life forevermore.

We are Christians after all. That means we belong to Christ and that identity shapes who we are. Like the man at the Beautiful Gate, we are beggars who have been given new life. Our lives have been changed from being takers to being givers. Every week we open our hands to receive the presence of Christ in bread and wine and we leave ready to give away the love that has so generously been poured out upon us.

We have received healing for the most heinous sickness of all, sin – we know all of the tentacles that sin produces. We get tangled up in it all the time. But again and again Jesus meets us with healing and new life. He touches us. He lets us touch him. We are freed from our bondage to sin and death, and we are able to have a relationship with him and a new way of relating to one another.

The web of sin that is being woven in our world right now keeps getting more and more tangled. We are going down a slippery slope where God's plans not only for the family but for human identity itself are being ignored, where children are being led astray in the name of love and acceptance, they are being taught to hate their own bodies and to deny the future that God has in mind for them. But it doesn't have to be this way. There is healing for each life, healing for our world in the precious name of Jesus.

I guess there is one more old-time adage that I should address in this sermon – we have all heard the saying that ignorance is bliss. But we all know that of all the sayings that are out there this one might be the

one that we should definitely label as untrue. Ignorance gets us in all kinds of trouble. Look at the people that Peter addressed in our Acts lesson - their ignorance led to the death of Christ. But everyone who acts in ignorance has a chance to repent. Confronted with the truth we have the chance to either double down and stay in our sin or repent and receive the refreshment of new life in Christ. That's why we gather week after week to hear God's word, so that our ignorance and any struggle that we are having with doubt and sin can be touched by the living word of God. And this is what we pray for when we see others who are separated from God by their ignorance. We want them to come to the refreshing waters of new life. We want others to taste and see the goodness of God and to rejoice with us in the Easter message that Christ is risen, he is risen indeed. Brothers and sisters, let us pray and let us live in the name of Jesus, for the name of Jesus, sharing the love of Jesus, until that day when Christ comes again, and God will be all in all. Amen.