



CHANGED LIVES
Acts 3:1-16

Today we read the powerful story of the first miracle that takes place after the day of Pentecost – which is considered the birth date of the Christian church.

We see that the early church astonished the world with its witness to the power of Christ and the message of the gospel. Our story today left people amazed and shocked. The routine and ritual of going to the Temple to pray was now filled with excitement and power. God working through Peter did something that was not scripted or in the bulletin that Sunday. In **verse 11** it shares: “All the people were astonished and came running.” Usually here at EUM – the people run during the final hymn to People’s Restaurant or home to watch the Eagles.

When you compare the church in the book of Acts with the church today – you see and feel the contrast. No amount of programming or promotion can substitute for the powerful witness and work of the Holy Spirit in our church today. The power and value of a **changed life** has a value and power that Wall Street can never calculate or produce – and – most importantly – cannot take away.

Dr. Lloyd Ogilvie - the retired chaplain of the United States Senate, and now teaching at Fuller Seminary – shares in his commentary on the book of Acts, “Acts cannot be studied without asking the honest question, ‘**Why is this power** – this vitality – this excitement – and this joy so seldom found and evident in the church today?’”

Today this text teaches us that the power that raised Jesus Christ from the grave – has now descended upon the church so we can go forth in ministry and mission in the power of the Risen Christ. That is why we opened our worship service today with the great hymn, “**All Hail the Power of Jesus’ Name.**”

Our Lord Jesus had declared in **Acts 1:8** before his ascension, “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in Judea and Samaria and to the ends of the earth.” Today we see the power of the Holy Spirit and the gospel message at work in the first circle – Jerusalem – this is home base – Mother church. This is where it must start – or we have nothing to offer the world. This is why New Holland must always be our first priority – our foundation for ministry and mission.

In our text today from the third chapter of Acts we find the marvelous miracle of a man lame from birth – healed and made able to walk. **Acts 3:11-16** gives the explanation of the miracle – and **verses 17-26** gives the Apostles’ message to the people who witnessed this miracle to repent and be saved.

As we open our text for today we see that Peter has emerged as one of the leaders of the Christian faith. We first see the evidence of a **changed life** in Peter. We remember and know of Peter’s impulsive and emotional outburst from the synoptic gospels. Peter was up and down like an elevator or a roller coaster. Peter was an unlearned fisherman – who eventually emerges as a great leader. Jesus sees in Peter something that only he can see. He sticks by Peter – even when Peter blew it on more than one occasion. The Lord loves us with an everlasting love.

In our lesson today – Peter finally gets it right. The political and religious authorities would often say of Peter and the others “These men have been with Jesus.” How right they were. Could the same be said of us? Could it be said of EUM, “This church has been with Jesus?” The evidence is seen in their **changed lives** – and the love they had for each other.

The early church leaders were often criticized by the religious establishment for being unlearned men and women. However, they had something the religious establishment did not have or want – they had been with Jesus. This made all the difference in the world. Some of our great reformers like Luther and Calvin and Wesley had great academic training. However, they found out without the power of the Holy Spirit it produced absolutely nothing. It produced an anemic church or humanism. Dwight Moody and Billy Sunday were unlearned servants as well. However, Moody led a revival that shook England and the United States. Some of the greatest preachers have never gone to Duke or Drew, Dallas or Denver Seminaries – but they have been with Jesus. It is only in the name of Jesus – and with faith based on that name – that moves mountains and transforms nations.

Peter and John were on their way to the Temple to pray. The formal break with Judaism and the Temple had not yet occurred. The psalmist shares that the devout Jews prayed three times a day – at 9:00 a.m., noon, and 3:00 p.m. The afternoon or 3:00 p.m. time became the most important for the Christian because this was the time or hour that Jesus died at Calvary on the cross.

This human being reduced to a beggar had been crippled from birth. In those forty years he had come to know how to work the system. Remember, the three distinguishing marks of Jewish spirituality were prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. The giving of alms to the poor was thought to earn you favor with God. The man knew the best place to get some help was from fellow Jews on the way to the Temple. Here he could manipulate the crowds – and lay the guilt on real thick.

When I would take Mary and the kids to New York City I would always remind them not to be taken in by the professional beggars. I remember once being taken in by

one who had an uncanny approach to pull the wool over my eyes. This man had two quarters in his hands – and he would say, “I need to catch the subway to get to work – I need 50 cents more.” Nothing big. So I gave it to him. It was only when I saw him work all of 5th avenue between 47th and 50th streets did I realize how smooth he was. Eventually he was written up in the local newspaper as making \$100,000.00 a year with that scene (and he had the weekends off).

A good beggar is not bashful. We see this in **verse 3**. He is straight forward – he asks for some money. A good beggar’s eyes dart from person to person until they find the soft spot. We know from **verse 4** that he got their attention. Peter actually shares with the beggar, “Look at us.”

We notice in **verse 5** that the man actually gives them his attention – expecting a gift in return. He was going to get a gift beyond his greatest expectations.

As Eugene Peterson shares, the first thing Peter does when he encounters the lame man in **verse 6** is to express his inability to do something. He confesses his economic inability. He admits his insufficiency. However, he did not use that as an excuse for doing nothing. Instead he said, “**But what I do have, I give you.**”¹ We are indeed poor in spirit. However, because Peter now had confidence in the power of Christ to respond – great things can happen. With the power of Pentecost flowing through his veins – Peter declares, “Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give to Thee.” The beggar probably rolled his eyes and thought ‘Another cheapskate – another religious phony.’

However, Peter – with the breath of Pentecost upon him – said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.” Peter called on the power and authority of Jesus – not Peter or John or any religious institution.

In **verse 7** he takes him by the right hand – and instantly the man’s feet and ankles become strong. Just reading this story gave me goose bumps – and caused my eyes to tear. The man got up and started praising God. Like Laurie sang today, he shouted to the Lord – praising him for his majesty and eternal power shared with him.

Dr. Fred B. Craddock, the great teacher of preaching, tells the story of the very young and educated pastor who made a hospital call to one of his dear parishioners. He was dressed in his suit and cleric collar. He read a bit of scripture and shared a prayer. The woman got up and started praising God and dancing around the room. She said, “I feel better already. Thank you, Pastor.” The nurses ran to the room in astonishment. The pastor was shaken by it all. He got back to his car in the lot and said, “Lord, don’t ever do that again.”

I can still remember the night that the surgeon called at LGH and shared the good news that Mary’s kidney was not cancerous. The doctor said it was a miracle. Our family praised God – whooped it up – we dropped to our knees in great thanksgiving.

The story is told about the time the great theologian, St. Thomas Aquinas, was visiting with the Pope in Rome. The Pope showed St. Thomas Aquinas all the great wealth and vast holdings of the church. The Pope smiled and said, "Thomas, the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" However, Thomas looked at the Holy Father and said,

"But neither can the church say to the world anymore, 'Rise and walk and be healed.'" Even the great theologian knew that the power of the gospel was to save men and women from the power of sin and alienation.

This passage is a reminder to us in the 21st century that spiritual poverty and impotence is far more terminal than economic poverty. This passage does not mean that we have no financial responsibilities in our ministry and mission to the world. The Parable of the Good Samaritan prevents us from having this mentality. Mary and I were reading in our Daily Bread Devotion this past week in **I John 3:17-18** "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no compassion on him, how can the love of God be in him? Dear children – let us not love with words or tongues – but with actions and in truth." Our youth at this very moment are preparing for the food drive at the parade on Wednesday night and with the red wheelbarrows at the back of the church. We have a Pastor's Discretionary Fund. We have the casserole meals from the Kitchen Ministry. It is all part of our ministry to meet the spiritual and physical needs of the whole person.

Biblical evangelism and action often begin with what we call **need evangelism**. However, we don't stop there. We preach and live the gospel to release the power of God into their lives. We release the power of forgiveness to bring others into a right relationship with God in Christ, and our fellow human beings. No other organization has that power or message. This is why in an election year we must be very careful about how we use our political influence and power. We must not become like the world.

Our task is to **change lives** by bringing them into the transforming power of Jesus Christ. Our mission is to announce that the kingdom of God is at hand.

We can know the joy of being forgiven, the blessings of eternal security in Christ, and that our lives have value – because God gives us value. Jesus has poured into his church the power and ability to do great things – and we must be sure that we claim and tap into his power.

The late Mother Teresa would always declare: For Jesus – to Jesus – love Jesus – all for Jesus – in the name of Jesus. She simply amazed and astonished the world with her simple Christ-like work and witness. However, unless she had been with Jesus – it would not have been simple.

I know of nothing more than EUMC – or any church – needs than for us to have members whose lives demonstrate they have been with Jesus. The evidence and power of a **changed life** is hard to discount or discredit.

The powerful story today is a reminder to us all – that ever since our birth into the world we too have been crippled and become lame because of our sinful nature as well. We stand outside the gate. We are unable to save ourselves. There seems no solution to our human dilemma. We are doomed to an unpleasant destiny. A man once shouted out – “The church is for cripples.” The preacher smiled and said, “Yes, but who among us is not limping?”

However, the good news that came to the crippled man can still come to us all **‘In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk.’** God’s desire is to **change lives.** You can receive that gift by spending time with him.

Reverend Eric S. Ritz, September 28, 2008, All Rights Reserved – Copyrighted 9/28/08

ENDNOTES

¹ Eugene H. Peterson, **CONVERSATIONS: The Message Bible with its Translator**, NavPress, Colorado Springs, CO, 2007, page 1685.