

Acts 3:1 – 4:4

1 Peter and John were going up to the temple at about three in the afternoon, the hour of prayer. 2 There was a certain man who was crippled from birth and who was daily carried and placed near the gate of the temple called "Beautiful" to ask for charity from those who were entering the temple. 3 The man, seeing Peter and John about to enter the temple, asked them for money. 4 But Peter fixed his eyes on him, as did John, and said "Look at us." 5 The man looked at them expecting to be given something, 6 but Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold coins to give you, but what I have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Stand up and walk." 7 And taking him by the hand, he lifted him up and immediately his feet and his ankles were made strong 8 and jumping up and walking around he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

9 All the people saw him walking and praising God 10 and they recognized him as the man who would sit at the gate of the temple called "Beautiful" and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. 11 While the man clung to Peter and John, a crowd of people, full of amazement, converged around them at the Porch called Solomon's Collonade.

12 Seeing this, Peter responded to the crowd, "You Israelites, why do you stare in amazement as if by our own power or godliness we made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, the God of our ancestors raised up his Son, Jesus, who you betrayed and denied before Pilate, though he had already decided to set him free, 14 but you disowned the holy and righteous one and asked to have a murderer released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead and we are all witnesses of this. 16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man who you see and know was made strong. The faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health, as you can all see.

17 Now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as your leaders did also. 18 But this is how God fulfilled that which was foretold through the mouths of all the prophets that the messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, therefore, and turn to God that your sins may be wiped away and that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, 20 and that he may send the chosen one to you, the messiah, who is Jesus the Christ, 21 who must remain in heaven until the time of restoration that God announced long ago through his holy prophets. 22 Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet from your people, like me. You must listen to everything he tells you. 23 Anyone who does not listen to this prophet will be completely cut off from among his people.' 24 All the prophets, from Samuel and on down the line, as many as spoke, predicted these days. 25 You are the heirs of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your ancestors saying to Abraham 'And by your descendents all the people of the earth will be blessed.' 26 God raised up his son and sent him first to you as a blessing for each of you to turn away from your wickedness.

4:1 While Peter and John were still speaking to the crowd, the priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Saducees approached them. 2 Greatly annoyed that Peter and John were teaching the people about Jesus' resurrection from the dead, 3 they grabbed, arrested them and they were put in prison until the next day since it was evening already. 4 But many of those who heard the message believed; and the total was around 5000 people.

Good morning, grace to you and peace from the God who was and is and is to come – Amen.

Again, I consider it an honor and a privilege to have the opportunity to speak before you all today. So, this week it's my turn to preach, and I consider it a challenge and responsibility to continue our study from the book of Acts following two weeks of teaching from Pastor Roger.

So as a way of getting started, let's consider the context for our scripture lesson for today. We know that when we read from the book of Acts, we're talking about the story of the growth of the early church during the weeks and months immediately following Jesus' crucifixion, resurrection and ascension. This is the people of God learning what it means to be the people of God in uncertain times. Jesus ascended into heaven and his disciples went back to Jerusalem to wait (as he had instructed them to do). While they were there, they appointed a new twelfth disciple to fill in their numbers (this was in Acts 1). Then last week from Acts chapter 2, we heard about the turning point in the growth of the early church - the spectacular and supernatural events of Pentecost, where tongues of fire and preaching in all kinds of languages led thousands of people to come to faith and encouraged the first community of Christians to form habits and practices for what it meant to live as disciples of Jesus Christ. In each chapter that we've studied we've witnessed similar scenes. There are people gathered around, the apostle Peter stands up and preaches and people respond in faith. In the first chapter there was a group of some 120 people gathered around the 12 disciples, then we are told 3,000 people respond to the message at Pentecost in chapter 2, and today we are told that 5,000 people believed the message they heard from Peter in the temple.

In our scripture lesson for today, the event that provided Peter the occasion to preach in the temple was a miraculous healing of a man who had, since birth, been unable to walk. We're used to hearing about Jesus doing these kinds of healings and performing miraculous signs and wonders, but this is the first time since Jesus' ascension that we have a record of the disciples healing people as well. Like I said, Peter seizes on this opportunity to preach the good news. This account from the book of Acts is important because it talks about the growth of the

church and the spread of the good news. The fact is, we are the church and the mission of this congregation is to... “Extend Hope in Jesus.” To share the hope that we’ve found in Jesus, to share the good news. This isn’t just any story, this is our story – the story of the people of God.

So, I’ll ask you this question “Where are you in the story? Where are we in this story?” Because if we don’t take this story seriously, if we don’t enter into the story with our whole hearts and minds, then it’s just another story and we’ll read it and then put it back on the shelf and go back to our regularly scheduled programming, our regularly scheduled life. You see, we can’t come to the scriptures as passive observers and then expect that what we’ve heard will have any impact on our lives. We have to enter into the story, to bridge the gap between then and now and *expect* to be changed. This is a bold step, but if you’re willing, I’d like to be your guide. Will you set everything else aside for a few minutes and walk with me into this scripture?

*“Peter and John were going up to the temple at about three in the afternoon, the hour of prayer.”* This is a great place to be, a healthy place to be. Here we are, it’s three in the afternoon, it’s the hour for prayer – of course we’re on our way to the temple, where else would we be heading? It’s Sunday morning, we’re dressed, we’re pressed, we’re on our way to church. Not heading to brunch, not on our way to the lake, not even cheering for our favorite team on TV – it’s time to worship the Lord, where else would we be heading? Faith gives a rhythm to our lives that helps us to find stability and confidence. Are you Peter or John on your way to the temple?

*“There was a certain man who was crippled from birth and who was daily carried and placed near the gate of the temple called ‘Beautiful’ to ask for charity from those who were entering the temple. The man, seeing Peter and John about to enter the temple, asked them for money.”* This is a place some of us find ourselves. We are in need, we’re desperate and we don’t know where else to go. Perhaps my need isn’t financial. Perhaps your need isn’t

physical. What is your need? Did you come here this morning hoping to be filled? To receive some hope, encouragement, motivation, reassurance to take back to your home, back to your job, something that would carry you through another week. Having a need and having the courage to ask for help is the first step toward healing – toward God. Are you the crippled man, begging at the temple gate?

*Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold coins to give you, but what I have I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Stand up and walk."* And taking him by the hand, he lifted him up and immediately his feet and his ankles were made strong. Is your faith strong? Do you allow God to work through you? Do you see the need in our community and give what you can to support the work of this church and this congregation? Do you respond to the need by volunteering with the Food Pantry or as a Teacher or by helping with Trunk-or-Treat? Do you give to people in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth? "Stand up and walk" you say. "Jesus loves you" you say. "Can I help you carry that food to your car" you say. "I hope to see you next week" you say. "Can I pray with you?" you say. Are you Peter, making a difference in the life of a person in need?

*Jumping up and walking around (the man) entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.* Has God worked a miracle in your life and you just can't keep it to yourself? Have you made a commitment to tithe this year and been amazed how God has provided in ways contrary to logic and reason? Is the experience of God's grace and mercy in your life something that's fresh and new and you find yourself walking and leaping and praising God?

*While the man clung to Peter and John, a crowd of people, full of amazement, converged around them.* Have you seen what God is doing in the lives of the people in this community? Is there something attractive to you about living a life with hope? A life with love? Have you heard and seen what God has done for one of your friends or family members or neighbors and you want this same hope for your own life? Are you part of the crowd filled with amazement?

*Seeing this, Peter responded to the crowd.* Do you share the good news with anyone who will listen? Do you speak words that are bold, courageous and even potentially offensive because you know they're the words that God wants you to say? Do you consider yourself to be a "witness?" A witness is somebody who says what they saw or what they know? For us, this is a legal term, a technical term. If there's an automobile accident or somebody falls and gets injured, "did you see what happened?" A good witness is someone who is willing to tell what they saw and is able to give an accurate account of events. A bad witness, a selfish witness is a person who keeps to themselves who doesn't want to get involved; who is unwilling to stand up and speak the truth- to tell what actually happened. For Peter, being a witness to the resurrection is essential because Peter understands that when people appreciate the facts concerning Jesus (who claimed to be Messiah and then rose from the dead) that they will believe, that they will have faith, that they will also become witnesses. Do you have some personal knowledge of the new life that Jesus gives? Have you experienced the hope of a life full of the love of God? Are you a reliable witness? Are you Peter, willing to respond to the crowd?

*The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Saducees approached them. Greatly annoyed that Peter and John were teaching the people about Jesus' resurrection from the dead, they grabbed, arrested them and they were put in prison.* Sometimes change can be difficult and sometimes I don't like it when people cause a lot of commotion and stir up a lot of controversy. Sometimes I just want things to stay the way they are. Do you have a good, clear understanding of God's plan for your life? A good understanding of God's plan of salvation? Were you born and raised in the church and you know what's right and what's wrong, what behavior is acceptable, which behaviors are permissible, which are not advisable and which are an abomination? I find it easy to be religious sometimes; easy to help the youth and families that you pay me to minister to, it's easy (and comfortable) to help them remove the

speck from their eyes and to ignore the log in my own eye. Do you have this same tension in your life? Are you part of the group that wanted to arrest Peter and John?

*Many of those who heard the message believed; and the total was around 5000 people.* Have you recently believed? Decided to follow Jesus? Said “Yes” to what it seems like God is trying to do in your life? This isn’t merely a rational, cognitive acceptance of a statement or set of doctrine. We’re talking about a willingness to put your trust in God. You can believe you’re your parachute is going to work, but have you jumped out of the plane; trusted your life to God’s control and said “yes” to whatever adventure your Lord might have in store? Have you heard the message and believed?

Do you see what I mean? This scripture passage is important, too important to skim over passively and then place back on the shelf. I know that the words of this message are powerful, they impacted me as I prepared them. So I would just like to apologize in advance for any parking difficulties next Sunday when we have 5,000 people here for worship.

Are you Peter or John on your way to the temple? Are you the crippled and begging at the temple gate? Are we Peter, making a difference in the lives of those in need? Are you walking and leaping and praising God? Are you part of the crowd filled with amazement? Are you willing to respond to the crowd? Do we want to silence those who offer new teaching? Have you heard the message and believed? If you’re like me, you can imagine yourself in several of these roles? Where are you in this story? This is your life, are you who you want to be? Are we the church God wants us to be? Let’s grow together. Amen