

Acts 3 sermon – It's still Jesus, It IS Jesus - Tregear 28.6.2020

This week we're be looking at another chapter in the exciting story of the growth of the early church. Like all good stories there are interesting characters, twists and turns in the plot, conflicts and troubles that beset our heroes. Today we have a lame man. But through it all we are again being pointed to Jesus. He's the one being followed, giving the power, the one being proclaimed.

Peter and John going to the Temple – we saw in chap. 2 that the first believers did meet regularly in the Temple where the apostles taught them. There were three stated times of prayer for later Judaism (9am; 3pm and sunset). When did these first believers meet together? Maybe at the sunset time after work. Here Peter and John are going to the middle prayer time.

The lame man, lame all his life from the time he was born. Every day at the Temple – so presumably Peter and John had noticed him, maybe walked past him many times. (Remember that the apostles were not local men, they were Galileans – looked down a bit as being rough and uneducated, country boys) They were in the big smoke – but this certainly doesn't overawe them. Note, interestingly, that Jesus would have walked past this guy lots of times over the years. Maybe this man had actually heard Jesus talking in the Temple, may have been there when Jesus overturned the money-changers tables. Notice that Jesus had not healed him.

We know the story well – “Silver and gold have I none. But I'll give you what I do have. Get up and walk!” Why this particular day? As I said there were probably many days that Peter and John walked past this guy – did they receive a nudge from the HS? How did they know today was the day? Had they been praying for this guy? Had the HS been giving them a loving concern for this particular guy? We don't

know. And it doesn't really matter. What matters is that this action is taken in the name of Jesus. Notice the way that Luke structures the story. He first asks for money. And then there's the healing. He does this to make an important point: what the man thought he needed (i.e. silver & gold) is contrasted with what he really needed (the action of healing). Healing does not take place because the right formula is pronounced but because Jesus is openly acknowledged as the only source of help and salvation.

There are two other interesting things here. First, Luke emphasizes that Peter and John looked hard at the man. They stared intently at him. What were they looking for? A sincere spirit, ready to receive more than he'd asked for? A heart full of pain and sorrow, ready to be touched by God's healing love? Somehow there is something important about that deep, face-to-face contact: not only did Peter and John stare at him, but they told him to look hard at them, too. What is about to happen is something that involves a deep human contact as well as a deep work of God.

Second, what Peter says will resonate through the next chapters and on into the wider story which Luke is telling. He doesn't just say, "Stand up and walk", as Jesus himself would probably have done. He makes it quite clear where the healing power comes from. "In the name of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth," he says, "get up and walk."

It is the power of the name of Jesus that counts, here and everywhere. The idea of names having power is strange to those of us who live in the modern, western world (though we sometimes catch a dim echo of it when some important person, a civic or business leader, or perhaps a senior politician, says, "Just mention my name and they'll let you in.") But most people in the first-century world, and many people in

non-Western countries today, know exactly what's going on here. Names do carry power: the power of magic, the calling up of hidden forces, the summoning up of new possibilities beyond normal human ability. And the point which resonates through the narrative from now on is this: the name 'Jesus' now carries that power. Mention his name, and new things will happen. This is true now as ever it was. In this story it turned a disabled man who sat outside the Temple into a worshipper who went all the way in. There's something to think about. It's almost as if Jesus is walking around here isn't it? He used to do this sort of thing – tell lame people to get up and walk. But now the words are, "in the name of Jesus, get up and walk." Jesus' power is still here in this account. The Holy Spirit has come and we see the Spirit moving Peter and John to do things in Jesus' name.

I want to make some comments about healing and miracles here. Luke mentions that the apostles performed many miracles, signs and wonders, but this miracle here in chapter 3 is the only miracle performed by an apostle that is recorded by Luke in Jerusalem. We do see a few miracles performed by other people, Stephen, Philip, Ananias and then Paul and Barnabas. But it's a limited number of people and generally they are people who are leaders in their church community. It seems fairly clear that these miracles were signs to demonstrate that God was at work here approving the message and backing up the message that is being proclaimed. It's significant to note that the apostles were not called to be healers but to be witnesses to Jesus' resurrection and the implications of that for all people.

So should we be healing today? I don't think we can simply command healing in the name of Jesus. But we can pray for others in Jesus' name, knowing that Jesus is gracious and has the power to heal them. Let me say something else here though. I think very often we overlook the healing that God is doing in our lives every day in many ways. Let me explain what I mean. I've been working on some renovations on

our kitchen these past 2 weeks. I've had a number of cuts on my fingers. It's amazing how within 48 hours the cuts have started to heal over and within a week or so there is no mark anymore. Now this may not seem amazing to you. But my friend was telling me this week that when he was growing up there was a man down the road who pricked his finger on a thorn on the rose bush. This got infected and he died from the infection. His finger did not heal. We so easily take for granted the extraordinary healing qualities of our body that God has given us.

But it's not just this sort of physical healing. We need emotional healing and spiritual healing. In fact we need the spiritual healing far more than the physical healing don't we? Jesus said that he didn't come primarily to heal people, or even to teach people, although he did do those things. He came to die on the cross because of the spiritual healing we needed. As Peter said last week, we need to repent or turn around and be forgiven for our sins, for our rebellious attitude towards God. I need God's spirit to work in me to change me. To heal me of the defensive attitude I have when I think I am being accused; to heal me of my proud attitude when I refuse to forgive someone who spoke unkind words to me; to heal me of my complaining words when I feel I should have an easier life. Yes, Jesus is powerful to heal in all of these things. And I believe he's also powerful to heal the emotional hurts that we carry from an unloving friend or spouse; the emotional pain of being rejected or feeling that I failed. Let Jesus in on these things in our lives. Let him bring healing.

Now does this mean that everything is going to be rosy once we follow Jesus because he's going to heal us physically, emotionally and spiritually? No. We do have forgiveness and our relationship with God has been put right when we trust Jesus and turn to follow him. But Jesus never promises that everything else will be healed. But he does promise us his strength (I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me – Philippians 4:13) and his presence (and I am with you always –

Matthew 28:20). And we hold on to the sure hope that Jesus will restore us completely when we die and we go home to be with him in a new heaven and a new earth. I might just add that it's an amazing miracle when someone turns to Jesus. When God works in someone to change them that is indeed a miracle – and this spiritual transformation is far more significant in the long term, in eternal value, than the physical healing.

Now I realise as I say these things that I have had very few physical ailments; many of you listening this morning have had far more experience of physical difficulties. I cannot relate to this. And I have difficulty in really expressing what God is doing in all that is happening in our lives. I may have missed key points here; but I want us to discuss and wrestle with these ideas.

The guy's jumping around, healed and praising God – making a bit of noise. Probably a bit of “Hey look at me, yeah, yeah, I'm the one who was crippled. I can walk. Woohoo!

So people rush out in amazement – a bit like the scenario in chap 2 with the coming of the HS. What do they see - they see the man holding on to Peter and John. The New Living Translation says Peter saw his opportunity and began speaking. What does he say?

1. Don't be surprised v.12
2. God has done this to bring glory to Jesus by doing this v.13
3. The same Jesus you rejected and killed v.13,14
4. We are witnesses v.15
5. Faith in Jesus' name has healed this man v.16
6. You acted in ignorance v.17

7. God fulfilled what the prophets had foretold v.18
8. Your response – repent so sins will be wiped away
9. Times of refreshment come
10. And the final restoration comes when he returns
11. Moses' warning – listen to Jesus or be cut off from God's people
12. Every prophet spoke about what is happening today
13. God's promises to Abraham have come true in Jesus
14. Jesus sent first to the Jews and to turn each person individually back to God

I just want to highlight a couple of points:

Remember it was in this same Temple just a few weeks before that Jesus had stood and spoken out to the people who would listen. Peter now says three remarkable things about Jesus. In v.13 he uses this phrase, "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." This is the phrase that God used when he addressed Moses at the burning bush in Exodus 3. God wanted Moses to know that this wasn't just some odd experience that he was having. At this burning bush God is calling Moses and telling him to go back from the desert in to Egypt and to lead his people out from slavery into freedom. God wants Moses to know that this really is Israel's God speaking. And Peter here is saying to the people, this same God, OUR God, is doing something remarkable again, and it is through Jesus.

The second thing is that he uses the word "servant" to refer to Jesus in v.13 – Our Jewish minds would go back to Isaiah and especially chapter 53 – Peter is saying that Jesus was the innocent suffering servant sent by God who would bear the sins of all of us.

Thirdly, he says in v.15 – “you killed the author of life” – the one who brought the whole world into being, the one who keeps the whole world going. You killed him!! Can you feel the crazy twist here? The one who gave you life, you killed him. BUT BUT what did God do? God RAISED HIM FROM THE DEAD!!!

I’d love to say more but let me finish with Peter’s finishing words in v. 26 – After Jesus has now been raised from the dead, God has sent his messengers first to you. How blessed you are! But, you will only be blessed as you turn “each of you” from your sinful ways.” God is no longer saying “Oh, you’re Jewish ok that’s fine you’re in my family. No, there is now the need for each individual to turn back from their sinful ways. And what’s that word – Repent. Each of them must repent and turn to follow Jesus, to go in his direction – to be the “turned around people” and the “coming back home” people. Forget about a restored kingdom of Judah. There is no kingdom of Judah that God is going to restore; it is a new kingdom of God that Jesus reigns over. You wanna come into that kingdom, you gotta turn and follow Jesus as King.

TAKEAWAYS – People come rushing to him after the healing. Another opportunity to be a witness. How do we witness to others around us? Peter wasn’t going into the Temple to witness; he was going in to pray to God. But he was **ready** to witness. God brought the people to him. Now it was a rather unusual circumstance – a lame man being able to walk instantly. A miracle!

Peter talks about their history which they knew – he relates what they have seen and what they knew to Jesus.

As we talk to people most of them will not be Jews. So, what is our starting point? We are also witnesses to Jesus, to our neighbours, to our families, to our friends.

Going back to chap.2 – v.43 “there was a deep sense of awe”. We didn’t look at that expression last week but one comment I read really struck me. This guy said that this sense of awe was inspired by the consciousness that God was working in their midst, so that they were witnesses of the final drama, and indeed participants in it.” Am I conscious that God is working here in our midst, in our church, in our neighbourhood, in our nation and I as his person am in this? And then, the fact that I am a witness to what God is doing and indeed a participant in it.

And there were miraculous signs at that time, but there was something about the lives of these people – v.46 and 47 – the sharing, the joy, the generosity, praising God (because of God’s goodness to them and for Jesus) and so they enjoy the goodwill of the people – people responded positively to them. Now we will find that there was opposition and that will come very soon, but the lives of these early Christians were such that people were drawn to them. So Luke finishes this little summary of the church with God was adding to their number (v.47). I think the everyday lives that were being lived were a testimony.

We have something very special. I think sometimes we’re a bit shy or embarrassed to share this with others. Don’t be! And I’m speaking to myself here.

Every day I spend the day with the creator of the universe! I talk with him, listen to him, commit my day to him. I am his child. Each day the Spirit is speaking into my life; growing the fruit in my life; convicting me of sin; changing me. In the humdrum of life, the daily business of life, I know that I forget this. I’m just trying to survive; to get through another day. But I have someone with me, in me, that sets me apart from so many people in my street, where I work.

It's not about getting more people to church; it's about being witnesses to the walk I have with Jesus each day

I don't think Peter and John knew that they would be healing a man that day or that they would be preaching in the Temple BUT they were ready for that. Please pray for me that I would be ready. Let's pray for each other that we would each be ready.

