

“RISE UP AND WALK.”

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First Christian Reformed Church

June 17, 2018, 10:30 AM

Scripture Texts: Acts 3:1-10

Prayer: Holy Father, thank you for your true and eternal Word and that you have not left us in the dark. Cause your Word to be a lamp to our feet and a light to our path. Honor your Word and edify your people according to our need for your glory. In Jesus name, Amen.

Introduction.

In last week's sermon I said we were looking at a snapshot summary of life in the early church and

This morning's text is like a close up. Luke referred in his summary to daily visits to the temple, and now he references one of those daily visits, at 3 pm in the afternoon, the time of the evening sacrifice. But something happened at 3 pm that afternoon. In that summary Luke also wrote:

Acts 2:43 Awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles.

Luke tells us the story of one of those signs and wonders, the miraculous healing of a man born lame, a beautiful thing happened at a gate called Beautiful.

The beauty of an insignificant life in God's eyes

It starts with a nameless, crippled beggar. In the scope of human history, it doesn't get much more insignificant than that. He is like so many nameless people we pass by in life, like those nameless sign holders on the Guide and at so many intersections of life.

This poor soul lives a degrading, demeaning life, reduced to laying on the ground begging, always looking up, always being looked down on. He didn't just have a limp, he was so lame he had to be carried, he was helpless, completely dependent on others.

Because of his deformity he was considered an outcast and was not allowed by law into the inner temple area, so they laid him at the closest point, at this gate called Beautiful. He could get no closer to the presence of God.

Where was God in his life? People coming and going, a constant flow of worshippers, ignoring him, averting their eyes, passing by on the other side, perhaps annoyed by the intrusion on their thoughts, on their good life, on their feeling good about themselves.

It has always been custom in many cultures for the lame to congregate around temples or shrines or holy places to appeal to the mercy of those going to those places. One expects those intent on worshiping God to have compassion and be generous. Poor and homeless and needy people always turn to churches and Christians.

We are told he was crippled from birth to impress on us two things. First, he is well known, everyone for the last 40 years is well aware of this man's condition. This is not a lameness caused by disease or some accident from which he might recover. This is a birth defect. There is no setup, scam or fraud here. Second, to show the greatness of the healing.

The man asks for money, "alms for the poor," he cried out, "alms for the poor." Day after day, year after year. Where was God at three o'clock in the afternoon?

To him this day was no different than any other, but to God his life and this day had all the significance in the world. His life mattered to God, in fact he had been created for this day.

Remember when the disciples saw a man born blind and asked Jesus,

John 9:2-3 "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" 3 Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned, or his parents, but that the works of God might be displayed in him.

The works of God are about to be displayed in this man's life. The beauty of what God can do with an insignificant life is about to be revealed.

Never underestimate what God can do with an insignificant life and never underestimate what God can do with the seemingly meaninglessness of your suffering.

Never underestimate God's purposes and God's ways and what He is doing even if you think you don't matter or amount to much. You are an image bearer and you are part of His will.

The beauty of an insignificant encounter, while keeping an insignificant appointment.

We are by nature lazy. Just look at how hard it is to keep consistent with exercise or a diet. And how much more when it comes to spiritual disciplines. We all know how hard it is to keep up regular prayer and Scripture reading, whether for ourselves or with our families. Even getting to worship can be a challenge, especially in the summer.

We know the value of being disciplined and staying consistent. And when we do how often do we find God meets us in the daily and routine keeping of spiritual duties. In the beauty of a simple unassuming devotion to God, God interrupts them for a bigger purpose.

The unspoken rule with beggars and homeless is don't make eye contact. Eye contact says you see them and acknowledge they exist, that they are human, that they are like you. We engage others with our eyes.

He spent his day calling out again and again, but years of seeing eyes full of pity or contempt, years of disappointment and being rebuffed or ignored produced a hedge of indifference around him, even cynicism. He may have stopped looking up at all, even if someone gave some money.

So, when Peter said look at us, that arrested his attention. Whoa, what's this, someone is actually talking to me. This is much more personal than usual, this bodes well for receiving something.

But then comes the usual disappointment, "Silver and gold I have none." Fine, then why are you even talking to me, you are just like everyone else."

But wait, what's this, an offer of something else? Could it be better? What would that even be? The man expected little, just a few coins, left over change. His expectations were so low he long ago lost any hope for what he most needed.

Where would he be if Peter and John had silver or gold and had just given him that? But Peter and John are like good fathers, he asked for money, and they gave him something better, something he needed even more than money.

Our children ask for things all the time that they think they want, that they really need. And they are willing to show their earnestness and commitment with a really good temper tantrum if denied.

But what does a good father, a good parent do? They recognize that the child thinks he is asking for the very bread of life, but in truth he has asked for a snake or a scorpion.

What do good fathers do? They take responsibility for their families and they provide for them what they most need. This is the meaning of fatherhood, good provision, provision for the long haul, provision that matters in eternity.

Peter and John gave him a healing in the name of Jesus. Peter went to the very root of the man's problems. God has given us Jesus, the best provision.

The beauty of the name of Jesus.

Don't miss something very significant that this miracle tells them and us. Jesus is still alive. They call on the name of someone who was considered dead and gone, but, He is still very much alive and furthermore, He is present.

This first miracle done by the apostles after Jesus' ascension is a great confirmation of the reality of our faith, ours is not a dead or powerless religion.

The power and presence of Jesus continue on and continues to this very day. Jesus is here, Jesus is with us, we can call on His name and He hears and answers.

Jesus' name is the name that is above every name, the name that spoke creation into existence, the name by which we are delivered from death to life, the name by which one is saved.

Acts 4:12 There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.

Acts 16:31 Believe on the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and you will be saved.

On Tuesday afternoon I will ask those who have gathered to pay their respects, what is your only comfort in life and in death? That I belong body and soul, in life and in death, to my faithful Savior Jesus Christ.

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Jesus is more than just a name. He's our only comfort in life and in death, our only hope in a hopeless world. When you believe in Jesus Christ, the Son of God, you have life in His name (John 20:31).

Next Saturday we are going to start our week of SERVE. 41 kids and leaders from four youth groups around the country will show up here and be supported and served by an equally large group of volunteers. What blesses me is how we see the power of a bunch of insignificant individuals working together to make a significant difference when we do it in the name of Jesus.

I Cor. 1:26-27; 2:1-5; II Cor. 4:7; 12:9-10.

A myriad of little faithful but seeming insignificant prayers in the name of Jesus are going to be turned into great power by our faithful God who delights to take small things and use them for His glory. You never know what God will do when you pray and because of your prayers.

We are encouraging many opportunities for prayer for SERVE, daily prayer, prayer bracelets, Wed at 7:30 pm, MWTF from the balcony at 6:30.

The beauty of uninhibited worship.

First, he stood, then maybe a tentative step or two at first, then walking, but walking quickly gave way to leaping and jumping. He was doing what he had never done before.

These are the actions of one who is overwhelmed by what had happened, he can't believe it, look at this, look at me. Look what I can do now. Thank you, God, praise you.

He didn't run home or out into the streets, but straight into the temple, the place of divine worship. He was overjoyed at God's great grace and mercy.

May we be a fellowship of worshipers full of joy and great gratitude.

I spent half of Friday at a Classis meeting where we were talking about the atonement of Jesus on the cross and how He bore the curse of the cross to satisfy the Father's righteous and just wrath on our behalf, sparing us from eternal death and reconciling us to the Father and clothing us in His perfect righteousness.

What a healing, what a deliverance, what a salvation, truly cause for rejoicing, for dancing and celebrating. This is authentic Christianity, vibrant, real, internal and external, with heart, soul and body.

I know there are many different cultures in the world and different personalities and varieties of ways to express our feelings, but I hope we have some ability to express joy over Christ and what He has done for us. We are expressive at ball games, at Christmas, and parties. I hope there is somewhere in your life you can show true heartfelt emotions to your God and Savior.

Do we still swell up with emotion at the miracle of our salvation, at the profound gifts of our redemption out of a life of sin, that our cold, hard hearts were softened by the Holy Spirit to respond to the Gospel? Are we in awe of God and propelled to worship Him and praise Him?

Are we still speechless over the power and goodness and grace of God? Do we boast in Him and give Him the credit and glory?

Has not Jesus done more than we could ask or imagine, has He not transcended every earthly expectation? We were hoping for alms, for a pittance, for just a little bit of help, and hasn't He given us an inheritance and riches beyond measure?

Implications and application.

This is a picture of us and our world. We are born crippled, broken, conceived in sin. We have never known a day when we are not in that condition.

Every crippled beggar is a reminder of the condition of my own soul. Every poor person reminds me of my spiritual poverty, of my inadequacy before God. Don't look down condescendingly on the poor, the crippled, the handicapped, the beggars, they are us.

All that the world can do for us is give us alms, whether we are talking about education, business, politics, science, entertainment, the world only gives us bandages, but no true or real or lasting help. Our deepest needs are untouched. The wisdom of the world fails us.

The church offers the one thing the world does not have. In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk. In the name of Jesus receive your salvation, in the name of Jesus you are forgiven.

Finally, fathers, follow the example of Peter, give your children a much better inheritance than silver and gold. Give them Jesus. If you give them Jesus you are a good and faithful provider, you have given them the best, what will sustain them in this life and in the life to come.

But you can only give them what you already have, you must first have the Spirit of Jesus in you. The best thing you can do for your children is to have Jesus, to know Him and follow Him, to read His Word and pray to Him. Fathers, be faithful in prayer, the stakes are high.

Jim and Bertha Bosman were seen by their children reading Scripture and kneeling by their bed praying at night. The kids more than once interrupted those kneeling prayers. Can you think of anything more beautiful than to see your parents on their knees before the Father in the name of Jesus?

And one more thing, dad. One time one of your young sons was trying to get his mother's attention. He kept saying mom, mom, and she said what, I am listening. But that wasn't good enough, he said listen to me with your eyes.

There is listening with our ears and then there is listening with our eyes. Give your kids your eyes, look at them, let them see your eyes, engage them. Put down the screen. Moms and Dads, listen with your eyes.

Give God your insignificant life. Give God your suffering. Give God your time of spiritual devotion. Give God your humble requests in Jesus name. Give God your free and unhindered and uninhibited worship. Give Him your little and see what He will do. Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God in the wisdom of God and in the power of God in the name of Jesus.