

## **“A SIGN AND A SERMON.”**

**Rev. Robert T. Woodyard**

**First Christian Reformed Church**

**August 12, 2018, 10:30 AM**

**Scripture Texts: Acts 3:11-26**

### **Introduction.**

We return again this morning to chapter three of Acts where we are given a sign and a sermon.

The sign is the miraculous healing of a man who was severely crippled from birth for over forty years. After walking, running, jumping, and leaping for joy, we are told he is now clinging to Peter and John. All the people came, they were amazed and astounded.

God wanted to say something and He used this miracle to get everyone’s attention so He could say it, and not just to them, but to us here and now.

**What does God want us to know? Four things.**

*God wants us to know all the dots in history connect to His story.*

I used the illustration of those connect the dot puzzles we all did as kids that make a picture. In this sermon Peter connected a whole series of OT dots that all lead to Jesus.

Since we talked about this first point last week, how many of you spent some time this last week connecting dots in your life? I have had time to think more about this and want to add a few points.

First, a word to you kids and younger people who have fewer dots, and the dots you have don’t seem to go anywhere, there aren’t enough to get a picture. This is where older and wiser and more mature parents and grandparents and other Christians really help. They are well down the road and can testify that God really is at work and makes everything connect in a meaningful picture. Don’t be dismissive when they say that.

Every dot is purposeful, planned, meaningful, has a divine reason. There are no stray or random or disconnected dots. Even what seems evil or wasteful or harmful, betrayals, accidents, illnesses, handicaps, are all dots God purposeful uses for His glory and our benefit.

Some of the worst pain I have known is kidney stones. How are they useful and purposeful?

They humbled me to see how a microscopic stone can bring a man down in an instant. They reminded me how desperately dependent we are on God. They showed His grace and goodness in timing them so away from Sundays. They showed the love and compassion of my wife who was a great nurse. They showed me how to love God and wait on Him in the midst of suffering. They reminded me that this life is not the best life, we live in a broken and fallen world, but there is much better to come.

For those who love God, all dots must work for good. All dots must lead to God's glory, the glorification of His Son.

Cultivate the habit of noticing God's sovereign purposes and grace and kindness and goodness wherever and whenever you see it, even in the smallest thing. I had a profound experience of God's grace this week in the midst of a difficulty. I wrote it down, I glorified God for it.

God's never-failing providence orders every event on earth to teach us to live by faith and not by sight.

**II Corinthians 4:16-18** So we do not lose heart. Though our outer self is wasting away, our inner self is being renewed day by day. 17 For this light momentary affliction is preparing for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all comparison, 18 as we look not to the things that are seen but to the things that are unseen. For the things that are seen are transient, but the things that are unseen are eternal.

*God wants us to know our sin and shame.*

What is it with God that He wants us to know our sin and shame, and works to remind us? Doesn't He know that isn't cool anymore, it makes people feel bad and He shouldn't do that?

Peter does something that most modern preachers wouldn't think of doing. He confronts his hearers in a very direct manner about their sin. And he doesn't just do it once or twice but he boldly goes after them four times.

First, you handed Jesus over to be killed.

Second, you disowned him before Pilate even when Pilate decided to release him.

Third, you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and instead you asked a murderer to be released.

They showed how much they despised Jesus by wanting a murderer instead of an innocent man.

Fourth, you killed the Author of life.

Peter was saying this to their shame. They should feel shame over what they did.

That's not very popular these days, certainly not PC. It makes you wonder why the church was growing so fast in Peter's days, if this was the kind of sermons they heard.

We live in a culture that has lost all sense of shame and the value of shame. Sin is no longer shameful, but actually shamelessly made public and justified and promoted. The only sin now is if you make someone feel shame. Shame on us if we ever make anyone feel bad. Why do you think Facebook doesn't have a dislike button? We shouldn't do that.

Hollywood and MTV and rappers and celebrities and politicians have torn down our sense of shame, if they can behave as they do in public, it must be OK.

I wonder if Snapchat has done more than most other social media to kill shame. Kids posting sexually explicit pictures knowing they will disappear in ten seconds (as long as no one screen shots it and saves it and spreads it around. If I was a parent of teenagers I would make sure that app and the others like it were not on any phones. Kill Snapchat before it kills your shame and your conscience.

How is shame good? Shame is our conscience talking, telling us something is bad. God gave us this strong emotion to be a powerful motivator to move away from what is wrong and toward what is right.

Our shame becomes the platform on which Jesus builds His grace. This is why people who are forgiven in Jesus can talk about their shame, because of how it glorifies Him.

Paul shamelessly talks about what he did. Jesus Christ came into the world to save sinners of whom I am chief. (1 Timothy 1:15).

We have nothing to offer God but sin and shame, guilt and unworthiness. God takes all of it and gives us grace and love. How much will you love such a God?

We will love God to the degree that we recognize the magnitude of our sins and the immensity of God's grace to forgive them. He who is forgiven much, loves much.

Do you ever think of yourself as a murderer of Christ, as one who's sin killed Christ? We need to see ourselves as part of that mob. My sins were the nails that pierced His hands and feet, my sins were the cords that bound Him, my sins were the thorns that tore His flesh, my sins were the sword that pierced His side. My sin sent an innocent man to the grave.

Do you think of yourself as one who caused the death of the Son of God? If you don't then you have not yet been humbled to the truth about your sin, about how serious your sin is and about the judgment from God you face.

Jesus didn't come to save good people who do bad things, He came to save bad people who do bad things. You have to know how bad the bad news is before you can know how good the good news is.

*God wants us to know our sin so we can see our need for a Savior.*

The best church is a church full of people who know they are real sinners, because that is a church that knows they need a real Savior, a Savior who can save them from all their sin. If we think about our sins lightly or not at all, we will not think we need a Savior. This is the point of the miracle, to point to Jesus and His healing power.

Notice how Christ-centered Peter's sermon is. He begins and ends referring to Jesus as God's servant. (Isaiah 53), He calls Jesus the Holy and Righteous One (14); the Author of Life (15); the Christ who would suffer (18); he calls Jesus a prophet like Moses (22) quoting Deuteronomy 18; and implying Jesus is the one all the prophets have spoken of; he calls Him the Promised Seed of Abraham (25). If you are waiting for the Messiah, He's here, Jesus is the Christ.

Peter makes the astonishing case that the death of Jesus wasn't just a fluke, wasn't just any old death, wasn't a case of bad luck or a bad judge or a miscarriage of justice, it was a fulfillment of prophecy spoken by God through His holy prophets for as far back as Moses and Samuel. Peter announced they were living in the days of the fulfillment of all the promises.

This miracle is proof of the resurrection, it is proof of the ascension, proof that Jesus is not dead but alive and seated on the throne in heaven with all power and authority.

Why are you surprised by this miracle, Peter asks? This is what it means. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the Living God whom you killed but God raised from the dead, in whom is found our healing and our forgiveness of sins.

The real miracle we should marvel at is the miracle that we who killed Jesus are still alive and that He offers life everlasting to us. The only reason we are not in hell for what we did is the amazing grace and love and patience of God. The man we murdered offers us life.

We are great sinners and Christ is a great Savior. His grace can melt the very worst sinner and make us into monuments of His mercy and trophies of His redeeming power. And this leads us to the final thing God wants us to know.

*God wants us to know forgiveness and times of refreshing.*

**Acts 3:19-20** Repent therefore, and turn back, *that your sins may be blotted out*, 20 *that times of refreshing may come* from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus.

26 God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, *to bless you* by turning every one of you from your wickedness.

If we really are worse sinners than we imagine, then it is a staggering reality that God loves us at all and loves us to the point of making His only Son our only Savior and that God's love is unconquerable and unquenchable. God knew the worst about us before we were born and He still created us and love us and redeemed us. I can't disappoint Him or disgust Him or change His mind about me.

Do you know anyone like Jesus? After all we have done to Him and after all we deserve from Him, He holds out another chance. What love, what grace, what kindness, what mercy. What refreshment and blessing.

Listen to what Peter is saying. They killed Jesus and he is offering them forgiveness if they will repent.

Listen to who is preaching, the one apostle who boasted he would never deny Jesus and then a little servant girl's question causes him to go into a full blown denial with curses.

Have you done worse than Peter? Have you done worse than Paul who was a blasphemer and a murderer? It is forgiven (I Timothy 1:12-16). You need only do two things.

**Repent.** Simply agree with God about the offensiveness of your sins, the seriousness of your crime, no excuses, no rebuttals, just "I have sinned, have mercy on me." Let your shame turn you around to come to Jesus.

*Put your faith in Jesus* and cling to Him like that healed man clung to Peter and John.

You know what sin does to your soul, you know how you feel in the midst of it, the turmoil, the confusion, the guilt, the shame, the depression and despair.

And you know what repentance does for your soul, the freedom, the sense of restoration and reconciliation, God's peace and presence. This is the refreshment of repentance. This is the refreshment of the prodigal son experiencing the welcoming embrace of the father, the tears of joy.

This call to repentance isn't just a one-time thing, it is a lifestyle, a daily seeking God's refreshment. It is a garden where you pull out the weeds every day and the garden is beautiful.

You don't plant a garden and then never come back to it. You come every day to tend it. So we must daily tend our souls, and to have our sins blotted out. Come every day to drink deeply of the fountain of His forgiving grace. Come every day to be cleansed and renew in the refreshing rain of God's grace.

How is it with your soul? Is your soul at peace? If we are in sin, if we are pursuing our own sinful desires, if we are living in conflict with those we love, if we are contradicting the Word of God in our lives and lifestyle, we are not going to know this peace. When we are speaking or acting or thinking contrary to our consciences, we are not going to have peace.

How is it with your soul? Are your sins blotted out by the blood of Jesus? Are you free from all condemnation because of Jesus?

Do you believe that your sin and shame and guilt are removed from you as far as the east is from the west? Do you feel that in your bones? In your heart of hearts? Do you believe that once you are saved by the blood of Jesus through faith in Jesus that the love of God can never be taken from you? God's intention is to bless you today when you turn from sin and turn to Him.

More than anything else God wants you to know that all the dots of history point to Jesus and He wants you to know that He has sent Jesus into the picture of your life so that He could bless you and give you times of refreshing from the shame and guilt of your sin.

Jesus healed that man so that you could know that He has power to forgive all your sins.