

Peter Healing Lame Man
Acts 3: 1-15

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April 18, 2021

Beggars and panhandlers have been around for thousands of years. When I worked in Kansas City, it was not unusual to see people begging on the downtown streets near our hotel, sometimes begging right beside signs that said "Help Wanted". I never gave them anything because I always felt like they were capable of doing something.

Today we heard of the paralyzed man who was begging outside the temple. It wasn't an accident or illness that made him lame, but we assume something he was born with. I'm sure his family had to do everything for him. They had to get him up in the morning, get him dressed and on their way to work, took him to the temple gate which was called the Beautiful Gate.

Day after day, they carried him along with his blanket and tin cup and set him on the ground. His shriveled legs laid before him and everyday was just like the one before. His legs were numb. He had never felt them, didn't know what it was like to run and play as a child and was never able to walk as a man. The only way he could earn any income was by begging.

This day at the temple would be a different day in his life. His day started out as a cripple. Peter and John often went to the temple. They would hang around the temple courtyard and tell people about Jesus. One day as they were about to walk through the temple gate, they noticed the man who could not walk.

The man was asking everyone for money. "Alms for the poor" he would say. If you've ever run into a panhandler or someone on the highway with a sign asking for money, you often look the other way so you don't have to make eye contact with them.

Peter looked straight at the man and said, "Look at Me". So, the man looked up at him and Peter said, "I don't have any silver or gold but I have something much better." It's hard to imagine if you are a beggar what could be better than silver and gold. But Peter followed up by saying, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" He then took the lame man by the right hand and helped him up. And as he did, the man's feet and anklebones were healed and strengthened. He jumped up, stood on his feet, and began to walk! Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.

What a day. A day that would never be forgotten. And this morning we are going to look at that day. It wasn't his fault he was crippled. Some of us do contribute to our misfortunes. We smoke and die of lung cancer. We abuse alcohol and die of cirrhosis of the liver or lose our family. But as far as we know, his paralysis was not any fault of his. Simply, the man was not physically whole and born a cripple.

This man didn't fool himself; he knew he was a cripple. He'd come to grips with that a long time ago. And it was a rough time to be handicapped. There was no social security or Medicare, no wheelchairs or scooters, nothing to make his life easier.

It was a time and an age when physical prowess and the quest for perfection abounded. The Romans had their gladiatorial contest and the Greeks had their Olympic games. And there was no sympathy and no place for those who weren't quite as perfect as they should be.

This man knew that he had limited potential, he knew that all the dreams and all the hopes and all the aspirations in the world could not make his dead legs function. He was honest in his evaluation; his friends were taking him out to beg. And he sought out one of the most profitable spots, the main door to the temple. The devout Jews came here at 9 am, noon and 3 pm. People coming to worship God, and he was trying to make them feel guilty. There's a lot to be said for guilt, you ever notice one of the favorite spots for the Salvation Army to set up their Christmas appeal stands? Just outside the liquor stores.

The lame man looked at all the people entering the temple eagerly, expecting a gift. Now that is a positive attitude. He asked for alms and Peter stopped, but instead of giving him something, he said "look at us". "Look at us" that was a good sign. It meant that they were going to give him. So, the man gave them his attention, -expecting to get something from them.

Put yourself in his spot, everyday of his adult life this man had been carried to this spot to beg. Rain or shine, warm weather or cold weather. He had days when he collected next to nothing and other days when he had tripled his usual take. He had taken physical and verbal abuse from children and teenagers and adults. He had been ridiculed and slandered.

Imagine going all day without eating and he had no way of going to the bathroom. But never had he ever heard anything like this. He probably had never heard of Peter, John, or Jesus of Nazareth? We don't know. But this we do know, he believed Peter.

The scriptures say taking him by his right hand he helped him up. Peter didn't grab him under his arms and lift him, but took him by the hand and helped him up. You can imagine the surprise when he was being lifted into a standing position.

He put his weight on his legs and felt the strength course down his thighs. He did something he had never done before; he pushed himself to a sitting position and then got to his feet. He was standing by himself. And slowly the realization dawned on him, this wasn't a practical joke. These men indeed had more to offer him than silver and gold. For they had given him what nature had deprived him of, they had given him his legs. But only through his belief did this happen, and only by believing the words of this stranger was he standing.

One minute half a man, the next minute a whole man. One minute crippled, the next minute healed. Just as his handicap had been beyond dispute so was his healing. Here was a man who had been crippled by a cruel quirk of nature, and yet now he was whole, just as if his handicap had never been. The legs that had never moved now responded to every whim, the feet that had never felt now sensed the pebbles and dust that lay beneath them.

Nobody had to tell him to go to the temple. Nobody told him he should thank God but he knew he had to. His very first act was one of praise and thanksgiving. He was on fire and he wanted to share it with everyone he met. He didn't consider if it would offend them, he didn't wonder if it would drive them away, he wanted to tell them what happened in the name of Jesus.

I can just hear him now, "excuse me sir, I don't know you but a few minutes ago I was a cripple, couldn't walk, couldn't even move my toes, just laid there on the street and do you know what a man came up and said, "silver and gold have I none but what I have I give to you, in the name of Jesus Christ of

Nazareth. Get up and walk.” and guess what, well I suppose you can see for yourself, that’s right I can walk.” His joy was so great. His first reaction could have been, “Oh no, now I’ll have to buy shoes, or great now I’ll have to get a job.” But his joy was knowing that now he could walk and now he could work and now he could buy a pair of shoes for the first time in his life.

It might not hurt if we got a little more excited about our faith, after all if you were drowning and someone threw you a rope, you’d get excited. And if you had cancer and someone developed a cure, you’d get excited. And we need to get excited about what God has done for us.

Peter had gathered a crowd. They gathered around him so they could hear the story about the lame walking again. And Peter told them that God had sent Jesus to heal and help people. They were happy to hear that, but also sad because they had called Jesus a fake. Many were non believers and because of them, Jesus was sent to the cross.

Peter told them that they could have their sins washed away by letting God know how sorry they were and by being baptized. While the people were listening to Peter, the Jewish leaders and High Priest were taking note of this fantastic story. Many were the ones who were responsible for Jesus’ crucifixion.

Even though everyone observed Peter healing the lame man, the Jews ordered Peter and John to stop teaching about Jesus. But Peter and John would never stop teaching about their Master.

Peter and John didn’t have any money, but they did have the power of Jesus Christ. The question I want to ask you this morning is this: What do YOU HAVE? You may not be able to sing or teach or give thousands of dollars to missions - but God isn’t looking at what you can’t do or what you don’t have. All God wants to know is... what do you have that you’ll use for me? Someone once observed: "God does not ask your ability or your inability. He asks only your availability."

One of the beauties of this church is that there are so many people doing so many things for God that I kind of feel like I’m preaching to the choir by preaching this. Preaching to the choir is telling the choir that it needs to sing, when that’s what choirs do! And to preach that you ought to do things for Jesus... well, many of you DO give of yourselves to Jesus. Many of you are available to be used by God.

But I suspect there are a few that don’t do much for Jesus because they don’t think they have much to offer. So, here’s a little quiz to help you evaluate your abilities:

- Can you cook? Take some food to a shut-in. There are people who can only take Mac and Cheese to shut ins. Do you know why? It’s because it’s the only stuff they know how to cook but they do what they can to contribute to the carry-ins.
- Can you drive? Volunteer to take people to Church. Make that call to one of the seniors that hasn’t been coming to church. Ask them if they need a ride and bring them to a place where they can hear about Jesus.
- Can you write words on a paper? Then write notes of encouragement. I have received thank you notes from pastors for giving them help when needed and notes of encouragement when I’ve done something for the church. It means a lot to receive a note of encouragement and it takes so little time to write.

Of course, we can't heal the sick or cure the lame like Peter did, but there are many things that we can do in the name of Jesus. Maybe we're the ones who push the wheelchair of a friend or help them get to doctor's appointments. What may seem like a very small thing to us, can be something very meaningful to others

Peter did what he did for Jesus. Peter said "In THE NAME OF JESUS Christ of Nazareth – rise up and walk!" Peter deliberately gave credit to Jesus. He wasn't doing this to glorify himself or to feel good about himself. He did what he did for Jesus. You too can do those meaning full things in the name of Jesus. God is looking for us to use our availability to help others in the name of Jesus. Amen and Amen.