

Sermon on Acts 3 12-19

Our reading from Acts this morning follows a miracle at the gate of the temple where a crippled beggar received great healing in the name of Jesus, and was able to get up and walk, not just walk, in fact jumping for joy at being physically healed.

I was reflecting on this miracle and what miracles mean to us. If you look at the dictionary definition of a miracle you get this:

‘ an extraordinary and welcome event that is not explicable by natural or scientific laws and is therefore attributed to a divine agency.’

I quite like that definition of miracle being a welcome event and attributed to a divine agency. Many of the people that I meet in hospital will often talk about praying for a miracle to happen, normally connected with the healing of an illness and in fact I have witnessed many miracles. Some of these have been of a physical healing, but others have been the restoration of a relationship or an answer to prayers for a situation that seemed impossible to change. For example that a seriously ill patient would live long enough to see a grandchild born.

Miracles are something that is very common in the bible. In fact when you google how many miracles there are in the Old and new testaments, you get a variety of answers of which the majority seem to point to there being about 150 miracles in total.

These range from incredible miracles in the old testament, such as: Moses parting the red sea, God appearing to him in a burning bush, Jonah being swallowed by a whale and surviving, Abraham and Sarah having a child when they are very old. To the miracles of Jesus - amazing healings, walking on water and raising people from the dead. And the greatest miracle, the resurrection of Jesus!

We sometimes read about miracles in newspapers or on social media. Stories that tell us of babies that defy all odds when they are born very premature, people who have survived horrific accidents, and animals that have rescued people from fires or other serious incidents. You may have experienced a miracle yourself or know of someone who has, and often we are not able to really explain what has caused the miracle to happen.

If we go back to the miraculous healing in Acts, it starts in a very ordinary way. Peter and John going to the temple in the afternoon to pray. They encountered the beggar at the gate who asked them for money and Peter said: ‘ Look at us! ‘ Then he said: ‘Silver or gold I do not have but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk’. Peter took the beggar by the right hand, helped him up and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong and he was able to walk and jump, praising God.

So we see that the beggar recognised who had healed him, giving praise to God, but that was not the reaction of the people who were all around at that time. They came rushing over to Peter and John and showed great surprise at the healing - seemingly attributing it to the two apostles. Peter then took time to speak to the onlookers, to explain to them the message

of who Jesus is, how the Jews had rejected him, why their rejection was fatal and what they needed to do to change the situation.

Peter uses the opportunity to redirect attention away from the crippled man leaping around the courtyard, to get it focused where it belongs: on Jesus, the Son of God.

Peter is quick to assign the credit for this healing miracle to the name of Jesus. He takes the opportunity to explain why Jesus' name has the power to make a lame man walk for the first time in his life. Yes, Jesus was crucified, a form of death that God condemned in the Law (Deuteronomy 21:22-23). But now the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob has glorified the one who was crucified. The very Jesus who died, who was traded for a murderer, is the Author of Life. Peter also outlines what the people need to do; 'Repent then and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord'

From this powerful speech to the people, many of them believed and the number of those early Christians grew to about five thousand. So great results from the healing of one man!

So for us, what can we take from this extraordinary encounter?

The Easter message of the resurrection is powerful and it does change lives. We are all encouraged to live with that belief of those apostles and early Christians, that Jesus was resurrected to that we can all have life in abundance and an eternal dwelling with him. To believe that when we do repent and turn to Christ, that we are made clean and renewed in his grace.

Together we can be an Easter church that lives out the gospel message in our daily lives. Its important to note that Peter may be speaking to the crowd but he is not alone. John is with him, even though we do not hear John's voice in this passage. He will be arrested with Peter and he will stand and bear witness. This story isn't about Peter or John, it's about being witnesses together to the power of Christ's name. As an Easter church we are called to speak out about our faith. Proclamation includes both the prophetic (speaking truth) and the pastoral (an invitation to pray for healing and wholeness that go hand in hand. An Easter Church also submits to Christ's authority. Acknowledging the power of Jesus' name. The crippled man wasn't healed through Peter's preaching or to provide entertainment to the crowds – he was healed because he responded to Christ's authority and had faith in the name of Jesus. "His name itself has made this man strong," Peter proclaimed.

We may want to ask ourselves a couple of questions: What healing in our lives points people back to God? Or "What still needs to be healed in us, so that we can give God glory and claim the power of Jesus' name at work in us?"

So as we journey through this Easter season, I pray that we will all be inspired by the Holy Spirit to embrace the good news of the resurrection and be witnesses to the miracle of God's promise to us through the risen Christ. May you all be filled with joy and an outpouring of God working in your lives everyday, through good days and bad, as Easter people here in these communities and out in the world.

Amen

