

## ***Giving What We Have***

The healing in our NT Scripture is a specific example of the “many wonders and miraculous signs” that were done by the apostles in this first church (Acts 2:43). Just as he did on the Day of Pentecost, Peter uses the attention caused by this healing miracle to preach to another great crowd. Follow as I read our New Testament Scripture, **Acts 3:1-16**:

*One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. <sup>2</sup> And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple.<sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. <sup>4</sup> Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.”<sup>5</sup> And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> But Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. <sup>8</sup> Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup> All the people saw him walking and praising God, <sup>10</sup> and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*

*<sup>11</sup> While he clung to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's Portico, utterly astonished. <sup>12</sup> When Peter saw it, he addressed the people, “You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?<sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. <sup>14</sup> But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, <sup>15</sup> and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup> And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.*

As we see from the experience of Peter and John with the beggar, our responsibility is to let God use what he's entrusted to us and believe that he's able to take what we have and use it. Peter and John gave to the crippled beggar what they had, which God used for the beggar's good and for God's own glory. God has given us resources that we likewise are to use to meet immediate needs, but also with eternal implications. Almighty God is not limited by our lack of resources, but only by our unwillingness to give what we have out of love for him.

Peter and John first gave the beggar their attention. They were on their way to the afternoon prayer meeting in the temple when the beggar asked them for money. The beggar had become a customary fixture beside the gate opening the way to the temple courts. Handicapped people, who were unemployable otherwise, were expected to live off of the generosity of others. And the best place for the crippled man to ask for alms was the place where the religious, who were expected to give alms, would be—the entrance into the temple courts. You and I have been encountered by panhandlers and the homeless, who assume church people are usually the most apt to be compassionate. (Parenthetically, my understanding is that panhandling on

city street corners is outlawed for safety reasons. And I think alternative assistance is available to panhandlers and all those with emergency need).

We can imagine that most of the people hardly glanced at the beggar, even if they tossed him a fairly generous contribution. Like the priest and the Levite in Jesus' parable of the Good Samaritan, religious leaders who didn't want to be late for the appointed hour of afternoon prayer, often the religiously devout, are likely to overlook the needy. It was the unexpected and unlikely Samaritan who gave attention to the man who had been beaten and left for dead (Luke 10:25ff).

As did Peter and John, we too need to be alert to those God places in our way, in our normal traffic patterns as well as in the usual experiences and serendipities of everyday life. When we're walking in step with the Spirit of God, we're more alert and attentive to people. We're then living missionally.

God places people in our path, in the normal "traffic patterns," such as the stores, shops and other places we frequent in our normal routines. If we believe in God's sovereignty, we know it's no accident that he brings these people into contact with us. Maybe like me, you're receiving a barrage of mailings from various charities asking for donations. I'm asking God for guidance in how I respond to these appeals. I'm grateful for Wendy and our Outreach Committee for leading us as a church to support ministry opportunities like Just Dane, Way Forward, special offerings, and many other ministries. These and other ministries are better equipped to assist the truly needy. As we prepare to give our pledges next Sunday we need to realize that giving to Dale Heights is a sure way to give to these ministries and causes.

Peter and John didn't consider this man as an interruption to their routine or as interference in their prayer schedule or ministry. In fact, this man became their ministry. Instead of an interruption he was an opportunity for Jesus to work through them. Peter and John looked intently at him (4). They were prepared to invest in this man whatever was needed and to see what Jesus might want to do through them. Whomever God sends our way, either in our individual walk or as a church, those people are worth our undivided attention.

I'm always amazed, as I read the gospels, at Jesus' "time management," even without the benefit of an iPad or smart phone! In fact, not only did he not have an appointments secretary, but he rebuked the disciples when they tried to protect his busy agenda from the interference of little children (Matthew 19:13ff). Jesus' three and a half years of public ministry were completely filled with meaningful encounters, miracle-working, conversations, sermons and teaching and training his disciples. Yet he never seemed to be in a hurry and he always had time for people. The only explanation seems to be that he was always in step with the Spirit and living each moment in the will and under the direction of the sovereign and heavenly Father. We too must live in step with the Spirit and follow Jesus and look for him in others, and not hide ourselves behind the facade of our religious devotion and rituals.

And as did Peter and John, we too can give assistance to the needy (6-10). The crippled man had expectations that were tied to his many years of begging for a financial contribution. And this was a legitimate expectation on his part, since it was the responsibility of the Jewish

community to give alms to the needy. And people today, and not only beggars, have expectations of us as Christians, who are to be caring and generous toward the needy. The people of God in the earliest church were willing and even eager to share their possessions with those in need, especially among those in the family of faith (Acts 2:44f).

But we shouldn't think of the needy only as the handicapped and indigent with their material and financial needs. The world looks to the church to meet their emotional, social, and spiritual needs, even though they may not be able or ready to articulate those needs. Some of the expectations of the church are valid and some maybe are misplaced and misled. The crippled beggar expected money but Peter said, *"I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you..."* Peter, like the other apostles, probably depended on the support of the church to meet his material needs. In fact, they may well have been on the receiving end of the generous sharing of the church that we see in Acts 2:44f. However, the beggar was to soon discover that Peter and John had something much better than the world could offer him.

Like Peter and John, we do have something to offer, whatever our financial and material circumstances. We may have silver and gold, i.e., money, which God would have us give to assist the needy. This is not a text against giving our finances and our possessions to help the needy. Some would interpret this text to mean that we should help people only spiritually, when in fact Peter helped the man physically, first of all. The most urgent need may be material or physical, and unless we show concern for alleviating those needs, people will not believe our concern for their spiritual needs, which we know to be more important. "Giving the gospel" while ignoring one's urgent material needs is usually ineffective. As the saying goes, the needy won't care how much you know until they know how much you care.

Peter and John basically offered to this man Jesus, in his healing power. Peter acknowledged that his power and authority to help the man was "in the name of Jesus," which means from the very person of Jesus (v. 6). As the risen Jesus' representative, Peter took the crippled man by the hand and helped him up (v. 7). What we have to offer the world is Jesus, but Jesus works through us as his instruments and he requires of us our personal involvement in the lives of others.

When we give what we have, we also minister to Jesus as we minister to "the least of these brothers of (his)" (Matthew 25:40). When we get personally involved in meeting the needs of others, and touch those in need, we actually encounter the person of Jesus. This was what Mother Teresa of Calcutta called "bringing joy to the suffering heart of Jesus."

As he used Peter, so Jesus today uses us in ways that result in a mighty work of God. As Peter lifted the cripple, this man who had been congenitally lame instantly was given strength in his ankles and began to jump and walk as he praised God for his miraculous healing. When we give to the Lord Jesus what we have, he uses it to work powerfully in the lives of others. The key is that we walk in step with Jesus and live and serve in the fullness of his power. Even though the hand that gripped the man was Peter's, the power that healed the cripple was Christ's.

Apart from Christ and the power and working of the Holy Spirit, we've nothing unique or of lasting value to offer the world. I'm not discrediting or minimizing the importance of charitable contributions. We ought to care for the physical and material needs of others. We as Christians should concern ourselves with the needy around us and those who are suffering around the world while we in the west consume far more than our share of the world's resources. But we should never forget that the greatest gift we can offer the world is Jesus. He is the one who lifts people from death to life and makes us whole.

In his sermon, Simon Peter "made a beeline" to Jesus as the Great Physician who made the man completely well (verse 16). This too is the most important thing we can do—to point people to Jesus. In the gospels and in the Book of Acts, miracles, whether during Jesus' brief earthly ministry or through the church, were a sign to point others to Jesus. Miracles never produced faith, but simply pointed to and explained Jesus, who must be the object of our faith.

When we give our money or share our loving ministry and witness, it's all for the purpose of pointing others to Jesus, who alone can make an eternal difference in their lives. All else we do for them is temporary. All physical healing is temporary. But when Jesus transforms a life with his eternal life a soul's destiny is changed forever and one's character is changed forever, into the likeness of Jesus.

I wrestle with questions over how and when Jesus heals people today. During his earthly ministry he seemed willing to heal any who called on him. I know his power is no less today than when he walked the earth and when Peter lifted this man by the power of Jesus. But it seems we must learn to trust Jesus with the way he chooses to heal. Sometimes he works over longer periods of time and uses medical science to heal.

William Barclay quoted an outstanding doctor who said "I bandage wounds; but God heals them." I don't like the fact that my late wife wasn't cured, that there's no cure for Alzheimer's. But I know that now, with Jesus in Paradise, she's healed. Like Nancy, some experience a deeper level of God's healing, even if they don't receive a physical cure for their disease. They have the touch of God on their lives, whose grace rests upon them (2 Corinthians 12:9f).

The question we face is, are we willing and ready to give what we have to others? In so doing, we are actually giving to and serving Jesus himself. We're called to simply join him in giving his grace and blessing, which is what we have to give, the most important thing we can possibly give. It's important to note that Peter told the man to look at him, and then took him by the hand and raised him up (vv. 4,7). People need our personal connection. Through our presence and personal contact the risen Christ becomes real.

One of the great theologians of the church, Thomas Aquinas (1225-74), once called on Pope Innocent II when the latter was counting out a large sum of money. The pope remarked rather condescendingly, "You see, Thomas, the church can no longer say, "Silver and gold have I none." Aquinas replied, "True, Holy Father; but neither can she say, "Rise up and walk."

We do have money, i.e. silver and gold that we can give more generously perhaps than we do. Our financial giving should be with generosity prompted by "the generous act of our Lord

Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for (our) sakes...became poor, so that by his poverty (we) might become rich." (2 Corinthians 8:9). We have opportunities to give through our church budget, to which we will make our yearly pledge next Sunday, and our giving to the causes supported by our budget can make a difference for time and eternity. And along with giving through the church, we have encounters with those in our spheres of influence who need the loving attention we can give them.

And we can, in Jesus' name, even if not in these same words, say to those with any need who receive the loving care of Jesus, "Stand up and walk!"