

“Stand Up and Walk”

Acts 3:1-10

Richard C. Allen

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Luke is the author of the Acts of the Apostles. He has great passion for building up the church, and his stories reflect that passion. If I could have only one book on a deserted island, it might will be the Acts of the Apostles!

What stands out for me most of all in our story for today is the lame man’s lack of expectation. His only expectation is that some merciful person will come along and place a coin in his hand so he can go and buy food for supper. His expectation is that nothing will really change, nothing new will really ever happen. He is resigned to his lot in life.

Contrast this with Peter’s understanding of ministry. Peter has this outrageous believe that in the name of Jesus Christ all things are possible. Peter has this faith that miracles are in the realm of possibility. In fact, he sees the world through the lens of miracle. If he were around today, he’d be singing that Paul Simon song that sings, “These are the days of miracles and wonder.”

For Peter, faith is needed to generate a miracle. AND, Peter sees that faith is often generated by being blessed with a miracle. It works in both directions.

As Peter approaches the lame man sitting at the temple gate hoping for alms, he’s thinking to himself, ‘here is an opportunity to plant the gift of faith in this man’s heart.

Healing his feet and ankles matters, of course, but Peter is even more interested in enabling this man to believe in the God of salvation, in the God who cares about his whole self, including his soul.

Peter doesn't have any of what the man is hoping for. He has no cash in his wallet, no money in his purse. I doubt he has a Visa or a Discover Card. What Peter does have is confidence in the authority of Jesus Christ. In short, Peter has faith. This is what he has to give. And this is what makes all the difference. 'Stand up and walk.'

I have a granddaughter I'm getting to know pretty well. I am quite sure she'd be asking, "Agogo (The Chichewa word for grandparent), did that really happen? Did that lame man really jump up and start dancing?" It's a good question. Five year-olds have the best questions.

I might say to her, "Nella, he's dancing for many reasons. He's dancing because someone has seen him as a human being rather than a bum begging for a dime. He's dancing because someone cares about him, really cares about helping him make more of his life than he had ever imagined. He's dancing because someone has shown him the power of faith. He's also dancing simply because he loves to dance."

Peter knew that this new movement that was catching on like wild fire, this new movement known then as The Way, known now as The Church, could only be sustained by faith. He understood that it is by appealing to the authority of Jesus Christ that the power of Resurrection is unleashed, that the power of love is revealed, that dead ends become cul de sacs, that failure becomes the seedbed for growth.

I am remembering Dr. Albert Schweitzer who went to Lambarene in West Africa as a missionary physician. Each time he administered a bandage or an inoculation or an antivenom or a drink of cool water; he said to his patient, 'This I do in the name of Jesus Christ.'

The good doctor brought his knowledge of healing, but he also brought his faith. He and Peter would get along as soulmates!

I feel our text for today from the Acts of the Apostles is particularly relevant. If we would place ourselves into the story, which I am sure Luke would want us to do, we would find ourselves approaching the church at prayer time, encountering someone crushed by life's hardships, and we're wondering, 'what does it mean for me to invoke the authority of Jesus Christ for this person?'

First, it means we can offer this person respect. When we offer somebody respect, we are generating a context for a miracle. That's what Jesus did all the time. He encountered people who had lost the respect of their neighbors, had lost respect for themselves; and offered that rare gift of respect. If I were on a scavenger hunt looking for a miracle, I'd be on the lookout for somebody showing respect to another.

Second, to invoke the authority of Jesus Christ is to let somebody know they are not defined by their deficits, but by the truth that they are made in the image of God. The man in our Bible story thinks of himself as crippled. Peter thinks of him as made in the image of God. Some would think of our grandson as autistic, I think of him as a child of God. Jesus did this all the time. He met people in their negative identities and transformed them by reminding them it was God who had knit them together while they were still in their mother's womb. If I were on a scavenger hunt looking for a miracle, I might stop in at an AA meeting and listen to a peer group telling one of their own, 'you are not defined by your addiction; you are defined by your being a child of God.'

Third, to invoke the authority of Jesus Christ is to let it be known in word and deed that the one society deems unlovable we deem as lovable. I suspect that the lame man's community tolerated him, but didn't really love him. I imagine he was the butt of a few jokes, the scuttlebutt of the town; tolerated but not loved. When Peter invokes the authority of Jesus Christ, he is announcing in no uncertain terms: 'This man is lovable. This man is loved by God. This man is loved by me. This man is to be loved by everyone in the village.' If I were on a scavenger hunt looking for a miracle, I'd be keeping my eyes peeled for signs of the unlovable ones being loved; the hard to love ones being loved; those despised in former times being loved in present times.

Stand up and walk! I hear these four words as an invitation to believe. I hear them as an invitation to live by faith. Did it really happen? Did he really jump up and dance? I can tell you this from my own life experience: when we call on the authority of Jesus Christ, miracles do happen. Doors do open. Hearts are melted. The lame do walk. The blind do see. And the dead are raised up. Like Peter, when we call on the authority of Christ, that's when we know we're living in the greatest of hope! Amen.