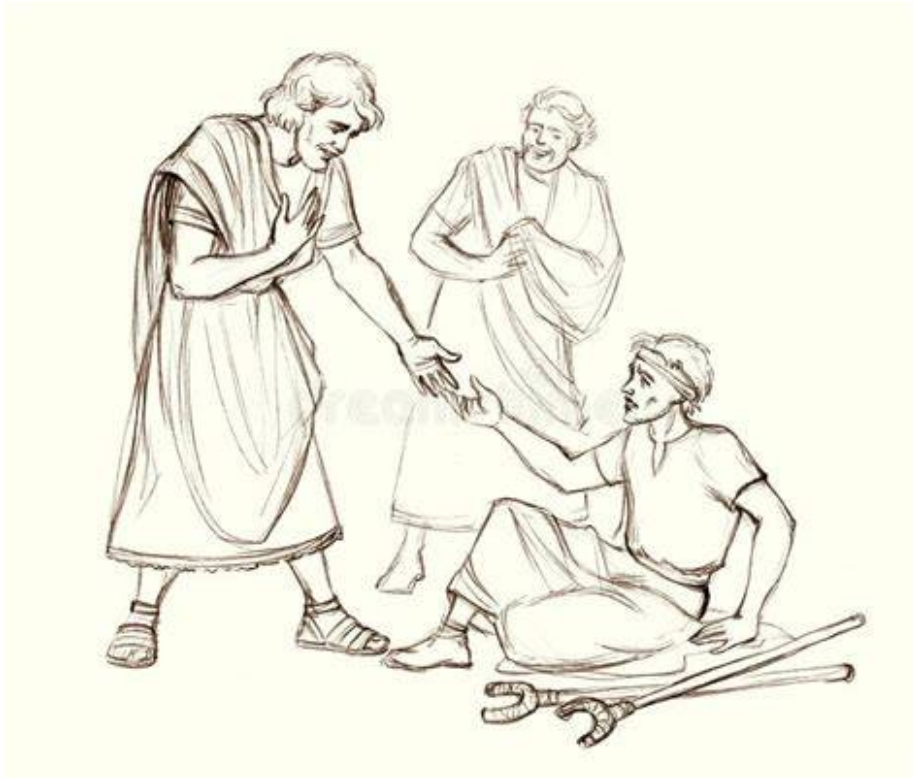

Lame Man Healed

Sermon • Rev'd Andrew Hoggan • 21 June

John 9:1-12, Acts 3:1-10

Part 3 in Acts series



Let's pray: open our hearts and minds to the truth in your word, and what that can mean for us and those around us, amen.

"I have no silver or gold, Silver or gold but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth get up and walk." Imagine!

Here's the situation as we move through acts. The church in Jerusalem is growing. Day by day the Lord is adding to the number those who are being saved. Ch 3 begins with a remarkable healing miracle. A sign that God is not just saving souls, but healing bodies.

In Luke 7 John the Baptist is sitting in prison wondering if Jesus was the real deal. Jesus response? “Go and tell John what you’ve seen and heard, the blind see and the lame walk.

The lame man in our story. All his life dependant on others for charity. Dropped off at the temple gate in the hope that passing worshippers would give him a few coins.

Along come the apostles, Peter and John. They look intently at this man. I would guess he was more used to people avoiding his gaze, people pretending not to notice him. And this is no passing glance. The word used “atenizo” literally means “to stretch one’s eyes to the limit. Like the old cartoons where you sometimes see eyeballs popping out of their sockets.

The Holy Spirit must have spoken to Peter and John. Their attention is laser sharp as they look intently at this man. He rightly assumes it’s his lucky day. He’s going to get something. He does. But not what he expected.

“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.” You would have to be pretty sure you have heard from God to say something like that, wouldn’t you.

Imagine stepping out in faith, speaking healing into a vulnerable persons life. People are watching. You back up your words, giving this person a hand up, not just a hand out. So far so good. You pull him to his feet, only to have him crumple in a heap.

To do what Peter does you would really want to know you were hearing rightly, and God had really spoken to you. John and Peter were well practiced in hearing.

Let’s back up a little. This is not the first wonder and sign spoken of in Acts. Pentecost was a spectacular sign of God's presence and it kicked things off. We read further that the community of faith that exploded into being that day was marked by generosity, fellowship, worship, wonders and signs. At this stage the HS is only working wonders and signs through the Apostles. This validated the Apostolic word and teaching. It shows they have the authority of God.

So this healing is not the first miracle. But it is the first one where we are given details of what happened. Why? Because this event, and what follows triggers opposition, ch4, and then persecution, ch 5.

Let's just say, when the Word of God is at work, and the Spirit of God is at work, and the people are at work, you can bet your bottom dollar the enemy, Satan, will be at work as well. We need to be aware, prepared and equipped to fight the battle we are in. Here's the truth. Get serious about the Gospel, get serious about seeing people saved, and you can guarantee the enemy will get serious too.

Always remember though, it is not an equal battle. The gospel declares both the victory of Christ, and the ultimate defeat of the enemy.

So to the incident that triggers a move towards persecution and opposition.

I'm walking down the footpath and I see a homeless person. I rarely have cash on me. I can still acknowledge them, say hi, smile. I might say "sorry I haven't got any change." It would be unusual, not to mention rude, for me to say "look I'm not made of money."

Why does Peter mention silver or gold? How often would you think passing worshippers would put silver or gold in the begging bowls? The most any beggar could hope for on a good day was a loose coin or two.

What Peter says about silver and gold is somewhat unusual, unless Peter is trying to make another point. What Peter has to give is worth much more than just silver and gold.

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." Let's note Peter does not leave room for misunderstanding in regards who's responsible for what happens next.

So too in the next chapter when the people are looking in amazement at what's happened. Peter makes it very clear who's responsible. He does his very best to firstly, deflect glory from himself and secondly, make sure the people know that God, through the name of Jesus, is at work.

Jesus Christ of Nazareth. It's a pretty full description. Like John Shoaf of Halswell Prebbleton parish.

I'm speculating as to why the clarification, but it may have been because Jesus was a common name in the day, especially in Jerusalem. "Joshua" from which we get "Jesus" means, "the Lord saves, or Yahweh is my help".

Here's the thing, if you've got lots of Jesus circulating. Lots of supposed saviours, and there are always plenty who say they have the answer.

Its important then that the real saviour, the real Messiah, is pointed to as the source of this remarkable healing and sign.

Let me say there are many versions of Jesus being peddled today, even in our churches. Some of them don't look like the Jesus revealed in the scriptures. Let me also say, a distorted gospel is no gospel at all.

As the apostle Paul says, "do not presume to be a teacher." "The teacher will be judged more harshly." I would take that to mean woe betide any who preach a different Jesus than the one found in the scriptures.

There is so much at stake. Nothing less than people's eternal destiny. "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel". Said Paul. And about false teachers, "let them be a accused".

Strong stuff, but we are in the realm of salvation.

As we seek to share the Gospel, always in our minds must be the question, are we pointing to, and promoting the real Jesus. Peter wants to make it clear he is speaking in the name of the true and only saviour, Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

Secondly. The gospel is not just about words. It's not just head knowledge and having the right theology. Words so often need to be followed by actions. Vs 7 . Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up.

In this miracle we see a number of things working together.

- Peter and John listening to the HS, and again you would want to be pretty sure you were hearing correctly.
- Peter stepping out in faith when he says "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth stand up and walk".
- Peter backing up his words with action as he takes the man by the hand.
- The man himself as he takes Peter hand and stands to his feet.
- And most of all, of course, Jesus.

What a remarkable sign this is. This man has never been upright. His whole body would be kind of configured to a sitting or laying down position. He wouldn't have any muscle strength or the balance needed to be able to instantly stand up, let alone leap around.

If we were lay in bed for just a couple of weeks and suddenly leap out of bed, we would probably do ourselves and injury because even in that short time our muscles would've atrophied.

What of this man 40 years a cripple, never having used his legs. There must have been something going on as Peter and Paul were looking intently at him. God must have been doing something in his heart and mind as well.

In the normal course of events, say this man had an operation to strengthen his feet and ankles. That would be followed by a long period of physio and rehabilitation. not in this case. This is a multifaceted miracle.

God is not just strengthening his feet and ankles. He's recalibrating his whole system of balance. He is strengthen all the muscles and ligaments that he can stand upright leap around. He is putting faith in his heart to even take Peters hand. No wonder then that the people see they are filled with amazement. Vs 10.

What of us? At this stage in the Acts journey it is only the Apostles who are performing these signs and wonders as a way of enhancing their authority as the foundational teachers.

But 2000 years of Church history prove to us such things were not limited to Jesus and the Apostles.

“what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.....how might you finish that sentence if you were to bring the need of someone you know to mind?

My own faith journey was certainly stretched by attending the John Wimber signs and wonders conferences in Auckland in the late 80s.

Our Church, under the leadership of Derek Eaton, was known for it's dramatic growth and expository, working through the text vs by vs, preaching. No surprise then, that many in the vestry, and in the leadership team would be encouraged to put the Word into action and be open to the supernatural.

It was terribly exciting. A bit scary. And challenging. It seemed somehow appropriate that there were about 3000 at Wilber's first NZ conference. All packed into a great warehouse, or something. I remember thinking at the time, just like Pentecost.

John Wimber wasn't just a great bible teacher. He was a practitioner. He would stop every so often and say. Let's put this into practice. Pray for each other. However, it was pretty unfamiliar territory for me at this level. Sure we would pray for each other in church and in our home groups. My faith and expectation was high but in a reserved kind of Anglican way, if I can say that.

That said, I did witness God working at that Wimber conference and I thank God for that experience.

To wrap up this story of healing and make it practical for us. I find it a great challenge in my discipleship journey to stay fresh and expectant and hopeful.

Further, I find accounts like the one we read about today challenging, not because I don't believe they happened, but because I believe they did. And let me add they still do.

To use the imagery of the passage, I wonder if Jesus is not always standing before us, directing us with his word, and offering us, as it were his hand, to lift us, or someone else up, and set us leaping and praising, given his work in our lives. Even more challenging. What if Jesus were to say to us "do you see that person". "Really look at them." "Really see them." "Stretch your eyes to the limit."

"Now in my name, and in my authority tell them how their life can be changed." "Help them on the journey by helping them understand the gospel as you unpack the Word of God for them." "Help them on the journey in whatever other practical ways are possible as well."

That was the early church in Acts. That's the kingdom.

As we finish ch 3 and get ready for things to heat up in ch 4:& 5, Think of someone you know who has a need.

How would you finish this sentence if you were speaking to them, "what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth..... "

Let's pray. Set us free Lord Jesus that we, and those around us might experience what it means to know you, Amen.