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The Leprosy Mission - Letting the Light In Devotionals

**Week 5 – Faith Amid Darkness**

Acts 3:1-16 (‘…as though by our own power…’)

At the beginning of Acts Chapter 3, we read that Peter and John come across a man who has been unable to walk since birth. Repeating almost verbatim the words of Jesus from Mark Chapter 2, they say to him ‘in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk’. The response from the man is vigorous and joyful: not only does he stand up and walk; he leaps around praising God. The response from those who see this man who was paralysed now leaping in praise is astonishment. Luke records them as being filled with wonder and amazement.

It is here that Peter begins to address the burgeoning crowd of people: ‘Why do you marvel at this? Why look at us, as though by our power or holiness this man now walks?’

One of the questions I keep turning to about the covid-19 virus has to do with who survives and who does not survive. I read one story this week about a woman 106 years old who has been discharged from hospital after surviving the virus. That is joyful news indeed. But it seems for every one of those survivors, I come across another story about someone fit, young, and healthy who did not survive, and whose future has been robbed.

The beginning of this week was difficult for me. I received word that, over the weekend, three people I know had lost their lives due to the effects of covid-19. Even more difficult, I know that their loved ones will not be able to hug or console one another when the time comes for their funeral services. This gruesome virus is a thief that continues to steal hope, joy, and life itself.

I find myself turning to this story in Acts and identifying most of all with the people in the crowd. Not only am I asking, ‘how was this man made to walk?’, I am also asking, ‘why him and not someone else?’ Why the man outside the gates? Why the 106-year-old woman? Why do they get to survive and thrive, but others have their lives taken away?

I can imagine these same questions being asked by those who have lost loved ones. But however much we want to know why, it is hard to imagine any answer that could ever make sense to us. It seems there are some ‘why’ questions that will always hang in the air, ever-present throughout our lives, without an answer, and all we can do is reconcile that uncertainty with our faith in a God who loves and cares for his creation. That is part of being a Christian.

However, I think there is a wonderful gem in how Peter responds to the crowd, and in his words, I hear something comforting. Peter asks, ‘why look at us, as though by our own power or holiness this man walks?’ The man who was disabled has not been healed, as it were, *because* of something. It was not by cause-and-effect, it was not a cure like reconstructive surgery or medication, it was not because the man was holy and therefore ‘deserved’ to be cured; it wasn’t even because Peter and John somehow had superhuman faith.

Instead, Peter points to Jesus in verse 16, saying, ‘The name of Jesus – by faith in his name – has made this man strong, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health’. If you notice, Peter does not say that it is the man’s faith alone that has done this (otherwise he would be crediting a human being for this miracle, something Peter was at pains to disclaim); rather, it is ‘the faith through Jesus’ that makes this man walk again. It is as though Peter is saying to us ‘this faith in Jesus that is given by Christ alone – it is the same faith in action you see here in this man who now leaps and praises God’. What looks like a story primarily about faith-filled apostles doing amazing things turns out to be the continuation of a story about Jesus who – in his physical absence – carries on working in and through his followers.

When I visited Nepal last year, I was able to witness reconstructive surgery being done for patients affected by leprosy. Because of a loss of sensation, people with leprosy will often see their fingers curl into a claw shape. But reconstructive surgery makes it possible for patients to use their hands, feet, and even eyelids again. It is a healing that I marvelled at: something that took thousands of years of human history to discover. If not for the pioneering work of Christian medical missionaries, Drs Paul and Margaret Brand, this healing would not be possible today. When asked why they committed their life’s work as surgeons to people with leprosy, they would point to Jesus. They, like Peter, identified that it was not their effort and ingenuity that should be credited, but the faith given them through Christ.

Covid-19 may be getting the headlines right now, but that does not mean it is the main story. The main story, for the Christian, is the continuing life of Christ through those who trust in him and follow him.

My hope is that we, by that same faith, can come to bring healing and hope to those like the man who was paralysed at the gate, and that, in our own healing, we might turn to God in praise. Indeed, when was the last time you leapt around in joy?

*Written by Jarrett Wilson-Gray*

**Acts 3:1-16**

**3**One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. **2**Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. **3**When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. **4**Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” **5**So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

**6**Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” **7**Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. **8**He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. **9**When all the people saw him walking and praising God, **10**they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Peter Speaks to the Onlookers

**11**While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon’s Colonnade. **12**When Peter saw this, he said to them: “Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? **13**The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. **14**You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. **15**You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. **16**By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus’ name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

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Registered Charity Number 1050327