

Sermon- A Beggar is Transformed in Front of Gate Beautiful

Scripture: Acts 3:1-11

Sunday, July 18, 2021

After the events of Pentecost which I covered over three sermons, the church was born. They did many things differently from the way we do things. The community was much more closely knit, the power of God was constantly visible to them as they had witnessed the miracles of the day of Pentecost and other miracles regularly and they were in the presence of the first hand witnesses to Christ himself. They also held all their wealth in common and distributed it as needed because of financial implications of being a believer in Christ in that situation. I had noted then that while we do not live in that kind of a situation, we have to be willing to do whatever it takes to support the believing community that we are part of because that is part of our witness to the non-believing community around us.

Today we will focus on a miracle that happened when Peter and John were going about their business on day. This entire section from chapter 2 to 5 focuses on the events that took place in Jerusalem. And in Jerusalem it is always Peter who is the center of the action. In the later part of Acts when the action moves beyond Jerusalem, you will find that it is Apostle Paul who is at the center of the action. But whether it be Peter or Paul or anybody else, these narratives are laid out to show the reader how closely linked these miracles and teachings were to what Jesus himself did and taught. The only difference between Jesus and his Apostles you will find is that while Jesus did miracles under his own authority or the authority of His Heavenly Father, the apostles did their work in the power of Jesus' name.

With that introduction we are now ready to go right into the scene that is unfolding in front of us. We are told that Peter and John who are living in Jerusalem at that point were going to take part in the 3 PM service at the temple. We know that in those days there were two sacrifices made at the temple daily. The morning sacrifice and the late

afternoon sacrifice. When these services were going on in the temple we are told that there was always a big crowd that would gather to watch the sacrifices being performed and to pray. The apostles would have attended these services regularly as well because they were still very much Jews doing everything that a good Jew would do. Also, what a great place to witness to Jesus Christ! These people were fishermen who had finally learned how to fish. They had learned rule number one. Go to where the fish are. Rule two. Use something the fish can relate to if you want them to come near 😊 So they went to the temple when the sacrifices were being performed to share about Jesus.

Now they also went in twos. This was in keeping with the pattern that Jesus had set when he sent the disciples to witness in Matt 10 and Luke 10. And the team of two was also in keeping with the requirements of Jewish law which said you needed two witnesses for a valid testimony in court.

Another amazing aspect of this story is that this event takes place with in front of one of the temple gates called the Beautiful gate. To appreciate the significance of this we need a little context. There are no records from the time that tells us which of the temple's gates was called the Beautiful gate. However, the Jewish historian Josephus does gives us some context which is very helpful. He writes that in those days the temple had 10 gates. 9 out of these 10 gates were overlaid with silver and gold. But there was a 10th gate which was the main gate. This one was bigger and grander than all the other 9. This gate was not made of silver or gold but a kind of bronze called Corinthian bronze that believe it or not was more expensive than silver and gold. Now what the exact composition of Corinthian bronze is also lost but there are many ancient texts that refer to how valuable this mysterious metal was. Experts today believe Corinthian bronze was an alloy of copper, blended with other metals including both gold and silver. We also know that it was exquisitely carved and the sheer quantity of Corinthian bronze was staggering. Because it took 20 strong men to open and close this

gate, which they did every morning and evening. So now you know why this gate was called beautiful. It made the other 9 gates of silver and gold look like the minor players. And when you entered this stunning gate, it also made a statement that what you are entering is more valuable than silver and gold. What a stunning and powerful setting for what God was about to do for a beggar.

Now because this was the main gate, it was where there was the most foot traffic. That is also the best place for the beggar to be because for the Jewish people there were three things were most important. The Torah, the Temple and giving alms. So people going in and out of the temple could toss a coin into the beggars cup and feel good about themselves. But they would also do this without paying the beggar much attention. We are also told in the text that the beggar was lame from birth. That meant he was considered inadequate to go into the temple and neither could he work anywhere. In that context being born with a disability in a poor family meant that begging would be his only option to support himself.

Thinking of this man is a big contrast to the gate behind him but it takes me back to my childhood. Because as I read this, all the beggars I passed by growing up in Mumbai come to my mind. Those were personally very painful memories. These people all had some serious disability too. Some from birth. I remember a beggar who used to sit at the gate of the church my family went to. Now that gate was nothing like the one we are talking about but the beggar was actually quite similar. He actually had no limbs and someone had made a board for him with four ball bearings attached as wheels. To move around he had to pushing against the road with his hands and I think he had a rubber thing on his hands as well. And guess what? He was also positioned right there near the gate of the church for the same reason the beggar in Acts 3 was there. So that people on the way to the church like me could throw him some loose change. There were many kids to who were lame on the streets in those days who were not born lame but were

kidnapped and maimed and put in certain prime locations to beg and at the end of the day, most of what they collected was taken from them by the gangs that put them there. Those are hard memories for me. I saw so much extreme poverty that it overwhelmed me and I had to zone it out just for my own personal survival. This story has a happy ending for the beggar and so it is very cathartic for me personally.

So let's get to the good part. Now Peter and John were in the stream of people walking to the temple that day but as they come across this beggar and hear his repetitious pleadings, they stop and turn to him. They look at him intently and tell him, "look at us". Now this really gets our friends attention because most people were not there to socialize with the beggar. So if someone wanted to talk to him that could mean only one thing for him. That they wanted to give him so much money that they wanted to make sure they were seen and acknowledged. But he was going to be blown out of the water with what happened next because Peter taking the initiative once again, says, "Silver and gold I don't have, but what I do have I give to you". Then he says, "in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!" and with that he reaches out his hand, and helps the beggar to his feet. This is physically possible only because as Peter was speaking, the man's feet and ankles were instantly healed. Just and incredible miracle.

And this healing miracle not only gave this man the ability to walk on his own two feet but it made him whole again which granted him all the privileges of participating as a full member in the social life of the community starting with entering the gates of the temple which until that point he could only be at the gates off. What powerful words from Peter that had the power to transform an entire life of a human being from misery to joy! And he had begun with these words, "What I have I give to you". So what did Peter have that he was able to give?

I believe he had three things. Firstly, Peter has a relationship with Christ that gave him an awareness of the will of Christ. Secondly, he had the power of the Holy Spirit. That

gave him the ability to do the will of Christ. Thirdly, he had the love of Christ that gave him the desire to bless someone most people did not care about. So Peter used these three things, his knowledge of God's will, the power of God and the love of God and gave these three things to this man.

It completely turned his life around. From that moment he was not just walking but jumping and dancing and praising God. All the people around were shocked by so great a miracle. It caused waves in that day and we are told that "all rushed out in amazement to Solomon's Colonnade where the man was tightly holding on to Peter and John."

So how does this story speak to us? Firstly, it tells us that if we have Christ in us, then we too have the three things that Peter had, an awareness of God's will, the power of God's spirit and God's love that is our primary driver of motivation to do anything.

Let's think about these three things for a minute.

Firstly, I have to recognize that we knowing God and therefore his will in a situation is really a powerful thing. When the people around us are sick for example, we pray for their healing not because we want to compete with the MDs at KUMC 😊 We pray for healing because when God made the world and people he did not make their bodies with any disease. He made them perfect. Disease is the "groaning of all creation" as a result of sin and the longing of God's good creation of the final remaking of all things. That is why Jesus healed people. And Jesus asked his disciples to heal people as well in His name so that people would know God's will for them. We pray that God would heal because we know that that is God's will. Now you will ask, what if God does not heal? Well, if God does not heal here he will heal in heaven. One way or another God will heal. But if he heals here other people will see and believe so there is an added benefit so we ask that God would heal the person right here. This is God's will. So should we pray, "if it is your will, then heal? Yes and no. The "if" part is only a question of timing. As long as we are thinking the right thing when we use the term "if" we are ok. It is always God's

will to heal, but it may not be now for reasons that is beyond our pay grade. But never forget that the stronger your relationship with Christ the better you will be acquainted with his will.

Secondly, know that you have power of the name of Jesus. This is when praying for miracles use this power. To use power effectively we have to be aware of it and be used to using it. This is not something that comes automatically. It comes with practice. How so we practice? By praying and living out our identity. We tend to live as lion cubs raised as puppy dogs. We are not puppy dogs who can only bark. We are lion cubs who will one day have a serious bite. The more we live our identity the better we will get at using the power of the name of Jesus in the situations that our Lord sends us into as his servants.

Finally, the third and most important ingredient in a Christ follower's life is love. You may know what God wants and that will tell you what to do in a given situation. You may be used to exercising the power that God has given you, that gives you the capacity or the how to do what God is telling you to do it. But friends, if you don't have love, you won't have the "why". The why is the motivation. Without motivation, you will not do anything. That is why Paul said in 1 Cor 13:2 ***"If I have the gift of prophecy and know all the mysteries and have all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing."*** Without love all the knowledge and capacity will sit in the starting block because there will be no motivation to move forward. Without love it is impossible to turn your face towards a beggar and reach out your hand. Without love you can do nothing of any value to God. Peter and John did have tremendous love in their hearts, the kind that only God could have put there. That is why they were able to reach out to someone everyone else was ignoring.

Peter did not have silver and gold my friends, but he had everything that mattered. He had the knowledge of the will of God, he had the power of the Holy Spirit and the love

of Christ. May each of us too be willing with all the knowledge, power and love driven motivation and we would be able to do all things Beautiful to bless those around us and bless God as well. Let us pray.