

Michael J. Mathey
Easter III
April 14, 2024
Text: Acts 3:11 – 21
Title: Power Source

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen. The text for today's sermon is the first reading from Acts 3. But before we continue with verse 11, it's important to look at what has happened in the first 10 verses. Luke writes, "Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."

A miracle has occurred here. The doctor, Luke, who is also the writer of Acts, is careful to give us the important details that we might have missed if we had skipped these ten previous verses. Peter and John are at the temple during one of the busiest times of the day, the hour of prayer, which was about 3pm. As they reach the Beautiful Gate, they encounter a beggar asking them for some money. Luke makes sure to tell us that this particular beggar is paralyzed so that he has to be carried and laid down at his spot in front of the gate each day, and he also makes

sure to tell us that he has been like this since he was born. This anonymous beggar doesn't know any other way of life.

But today will be different. Today, he encounters the two apostles, Peter and John. It's entirely possible that they have seen each other before because this man is at the temple every day, and the apostles have been there multiple times too, including the visits that they made with Jesus just a few short weeks ago. But instead of walking by him this time, the two apostles stop dead in their tracks, and command the beggar to look at them. Luke tells us that he didn't just glance at them, but "...he fixed his attention on them..." because he thought that he would get some money. The beggar's expectations must have come crashing down when Peter told him that he didn't have any silver or gold. He probably thought that he was going to get some trinket that he would have to try and sell, or maybe he thought that he was about to be mocked for his condition. But I'm sure that the last thing that he expected to receive was what he got. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"

You might imagine the beggar's hand trembling as Peter reaches out and grasps his right hand to pull him up. It's almost a certainty that this poor beggar had heard of Jesus of Nazareth before. He was probably there on the day when the Lord cleared out the temple, and he had probably heard of the miracles that He had performed. Perhaps the beggar had even dreamed of meeting Jesus Himself so that he might be healed too. Those hopes had probably died with Jesus on the cross weeks ago, but today he has heard that name again. And as his right hand is grabbed by Peter, his feet and ankles feel stronger, and he suddenly finds the strength to not just stand up next to them. But Luke tells us that he *leaps* up and walks into the temple beside them.

This man, who has never been able to stand up before, is suddenly capable of *walking* and *leaping* as he enters the temple praising God! As many of you know and as some of you have personally experienced, people who have surgery on parts of their legs need therapy to

relearn how to walk, and it takes weeks or months before they can actually leap up and down. But this man can do it all instantaneously, and the crowds of people at the temple for prayer time recognize him immediately and they're amazed at what they see.

These same crowds begin to gather around the three men, and Peter is led by the Holy Spirit to take advantage of the opportunity that he has to address the crowd. He starts by making sure that there is no misunderstanding about how this miracle occurred, “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?” The people are looking to the wrong source. Peter and John know that this hasn't happened because of anything inside of them. The only way that this man was able to walk was by the power of God, and Peter and John intend to make that clear.

But before the people can hear about that, Peter is led to tell them something else about what has happened here. He gives them the Law of God. Peter hits them squarely with the truth of Christ. He was from the same God that we have worshipped since the time of Abraham, and you killed Him in spite of His innocence. You denied the Holy and Righteous One, you asked for a murderer instead and then you killed Him who is the Author of life. This is the very One that was promised to Abraham, and that Moses and the prophets spoke about.

How can Peter be so blunt? How can he accuse all of those people of being a part of Christ's death? He isn't being very loving, and he is being *so* judgmental! What he's doing is being true to the Word of God. The only reason that God allowed His Son, His Righteous and Holy One, to die was to pay for the sins of the people standing there in front of Peter and John, and to pay for the sins of the people sitting here today. These words of Law from Peter apply to us too, my friends. When we sin, we deny Christ, the Righteous and Holy One. When we sin, we choose the murderer, or at least our own desires, instead of Him. When we sin, we kill the Author of Life who had to die for that sin.

And make no mistake about it, you and I do sin, constantly. Just think about what we heard from the Ten Commandments this past Lent, something that we need to hear again and again because we forget again and again. The final two command us not to covet. You would think that wouldn't be a problem, right? But every time you see or hear advertising, you're being tempted to covet, to want something to a degree that you'd do just about anything to get it. God's Word encourages you to be content with what you have, but how often do you seek after the newest and the best thing instead of being content? Remember, it was just a few moments ago you confessed the real truth that you sin against God in thought, word, and deed. It really is the thought that counts. When the full meaning of any commandment confronts any one of us, we have no other course of action but to confess our sin because the Law of God shows us our sinful depravity.

What can we do? We are guilty of the death of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the only Son of God. We're as guilty as the people Peter and John spoke to in today's first reading from Acts. Jesus died because of us too. We are the guilty ones. But Peter doesn't leave the crowds in their guilt. He also gives them the remedy that God has provided, the Gospel.

After proclaiming the resurrection of Christ, Peter tells everyone there how the miraculous healing of the beggar happened. "“And His name – by faith in His name – has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.”” It was nothing that the beggar did that healed him, and it wasn't any power that Peter and John possessed. It was the power of faith in the name of Jesus that accomplished this miracle. Without God already creating faith in the beggar and in Peter and John, nothing would have happened at all. God gave them faith in Christ, and He healed the beggar through it.

But that isn't all that God accomplishes through this faith. Peter goes on to tell the crowds, "...what God foretold by the mouth of the prophets, that His Christ would suffer He thus fulfilled. Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that He may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus..." It was God's plan to send His Christ to the cross to pay for your sins, and He made sure that it happened. He knew that we were powerless to do anything to save ourselves, so He accomplished it all. When you confess and repent of your sins, the blood of Christ blots them out, and you are refreshed to the point that you are made completely new in His eyes. When the Father looks at you, He sees Christ who already kept the Law perfectly for you and who died to completely pay the price for you not keeping His Law.

But our faith doesn't end there. Peter makes sure to remind us all that now that heaven has received Jesus we are all waiting "...until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago." In other words, we are waiting for His return when He will make the entire world new again. On that day, our bodies will be raised from the grave just like His was, and we will live with Him in a perfectly remade earth with newly remade heavens. The effects of sin will be gone, and our bodies will be glorified. What that will look like, we can only begin to imagine, but it will happen.

Until then, we live our life of faith in Christ here. His name is placed on us in Baptism, and in the name of Christ, our sins are forgiven every day and our new life has already begun. And while we may not always see the types of miracles that occurred on that day in the temple, we experience the miracle of His presence as we see and taste Him in the Sacrament of the Altar. We hear Him through the reading and preaching of His Word, and we wait for His return with the joy of Easter always before us proclaiming the eternal truth to the world around us that yes, Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia! Amen.