

Pastor Steve's Sermon for Sunday, April 26, 2020

Below are the texts and the sermon for April 26, 2020. Blessings to you!

This is the Gospel of Mark, 6th chap., v. 53-56

53 When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat.

⁵⁴When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him,

⁵⁵and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was.

⁵⁶And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

READING

Our second reading comes to us from the Book of Acts, the 3rd chapter, v. 1-10.

1 One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. 2 And a man lame from birth was being carried in.

People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms.

4 Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." 5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 But Peter said, "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." 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 All the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

SERMON

Last Sunday in the opening chapter of the Book of Acts we listened in on a conversation between Jesus and the Apostles about the restoration of the kingdom and what it will look like. Jesus explains to them that in due time the Father will indeed restore the kingdom and they will be an integral part of it. He tells them they will be witnesses to His Gospel of life, healing and forgiveness to lands near, and at the ends of the earth. But first they must wait until God has deemed the right time for their anointing with the Holy Spirit. These would be the last words of Jesus. These words would be Jesus departing remarks. As Jesus is lifted away by a cloud two men in robes appeared and said to the Apostles *'Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking up towards heaven? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in the same way as you saw him go into heaven.'*

This week we are beyond the anointing of the Holy Spirit in Acts chap. 2; upper room/rushing wind/tongues of fire/foreign languages spoken and understood by the 12 Apostles/Peter is preaching to the masses/the Lord is

adding to their numbers/sharing and caring abunds. Now chapter 3, the beginning of post-crucifixion, resurrection and ascension ministry, and the beginning of Holy Spirit led ministry and faith lives.

Peter and John are in their way to the temple at the hour of prayer and they encounter a man lame from birth who was being carried to the temple as well. Because of his disability he could not enter the temple as others could. His physical limitation somehow woefully and mistakenly forever linking him to having a spiritual disability. As was his routine outside the temple gates, the lame man was begging for contributions to support his existence. When Peter and John got to the gate the man asked them for alms as well. Within these two readings there is usage of a couple words that helps to define for us the change in Peter's faith comprehension of how to look at their mission going forward; how to look at God's people, and look before them. What will they see when they see in you?

The same original Greek word (atenizontes) was used for the Apostles gaze as Jesus ascended into heaven last

Sunday is the same word used to describe how Peter and John looked upon the lame man. An intense steady gaze. Peter and John looked upon the lame man with an intense steady gaze. I wonder how long this intense steady gaze moment lasted? The flow of the story would suggest that the gaze is not long. Let's fix our attention on this moment for a spell. This is one of those moments we are all familiar with at the interstate on-ramp, outside the convenience store, in the big box-store parking lot, outside the concert venue. We have all had the intent steady look gaze from that person in need. We don't know their story. But the scene we encounter them speaks volumes. Unlike Peter and John of today's scripture sometimes we are prepared for them with some silver or paper. Sometimes we are not. This kind of person doesn't have a credit card reader. What did you do in lieu of giving money?

Peter said to the lame man "look at us" ... "look at us". Using the same word he heard as Jesus was lifted away in a cloud, *Bleppo*...meaning, *to look, to see, discern, perceive*. As Jesus ascended the Apostles were encouraged to not discern

and perceive above, but to do so...*here on earth, as in heaven.*
“*Look at us*” discern and perceive what may be... “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.”

Lame from birth, he never knew what it was to walk, let alone stand. This could have been any other day at the Temple for the hour of prayer. He was not looking to be healed. He was not asking to be healed. Yet he looked at Peter, and in a moment **perceived** what could be of his future. He is being invited to walk into a new reality. Peter reaches for his hand. Still lame, he takes it. In the moment of taking the hand of someone who he perceived promise, and raising up to standing position, his feet and ankles were made strong.

He would not scuffle into the temple. He would not amble in either. No, he would enter with great joy, praising God.

How would you like to have what Peter had? There was something about his presence, the way he looked at the man. A look that said *you can walk. Let's do this. Here is my hand.* Or have the hopeful perception and outlook the lame man displayed. I mean he has been lame since birth!? The Gospel

of Mark we read is the same scenario, “And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.” Jesus healed, and now Peter heals. By invoking the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the power of the Holy Spirit moves upon the lame man and he doesn’t just walk, he leaps.

The phrase *leap of faith* is sometimes used to describe a person’s ability to receive or perform miracles. It was *leap of faith* for the lame man to trust Peters outstretched hand. It was a *leap of faith* for Peter to believe that he indeed had the power of the Holy Spirit just waiting in the wings to utilize the moment. Philosopher and Father of American Psychology William James wrote, “We and God have business with each other; and in opening ourselves to God’s influence our deepest destiny is fulfilled.” This is both a comforting and confounding statement.

We oscillate in and out of being opened and closed to God, destinies fulfilled and others left for want. For this we subscribe to the mystery of faith, that God is present on the

mountain tops and valleys even more so. Because it is here that we our faith coaxes us to look and perceive, to not just gaze off into the heavens, but to look about and anticipate the actions of God. And I believe this is where Peter and the lame man met...at the corner of God's business; Peter giving love and healing in the name of Jesus, and the lame man seeing it as truly being for him.

We know that Peter's gift came with great responsibility. From fisherman to the first pope and everything in between. Dubbed the rock by Jesus. He was the foundational person on which the early churches success was built. Yet, the maturity of of faith in Peter of the Gospels and the Peter of the Book of Acts are very different. What that tells us is that God was working on Peter all along. As he misunderstood, got in the way, denied Jesus and scattered, God was in the business of making Peter get it.

Peter knew what it was like to be at the bottom of the societal ladder...a lowly fisherman. Peter knew what it was to disappoint Jesus the Rabbi, Jesus the teacher, Jesus the

Son of God. Peter knew the shame of denying knowing Jesus in His time of greatest need.

So when Peter looked the lame man in the eye he perceived something that cannot be explained but only experienced.

We call it the mystery of faith.

It cannot be explained why some of us deal with disease and others do not. It cannot be explained why some of us are healed and others are not. It cannot be explained why those of you, with faith that I think can move mountains, are betrayed by your God-given bodies. It cannot be explained why hate thrives in corners of this world and God seems silent. It cannot be explained why someone has the gift of healing and others not at all. It is not for us to know, or attempt to figure out.

Author Jon Meacham writes in his book *The Hope of Glory*, "We must make our peace with the mystery or else we might go mad." He goes on to say that faith for him is, "complicated, challenging, and sometimes confounding. It is not magical but mysterious. Magic means there is a spell, a formula to work wonders. Mystery means there is no spell,

no formula-only shadow and impenetrability and hope that all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.”

Perceive the need like Peter and be poised to receive a fulfilled need like the lame man. Do so, and “all manner of things will be well”. How well are we aware of our world’s need for healing? Can we be aware like Peter, and present ourselves as did he?

Like the lame man, are we anticipating how the Holy Spirit is calling us to new life in Jesus through healing and forgiving us?

You are the church. Because you listened, someone knows the healing power of Jesus. Because you said sorry, someone knows the healing love of Jesus. Because you held someone’s hand during treatment, they know the healing love of Jesus. Because you made sandwiches, someone knows the healing power of Jesus. Because you handed out a blessing bag, someone knows the healing power of Jesus. Because you made medical masks, someone knows the protective, healing power of Jesus. Because you prayed outside the hospital for those inside the hospital, someone

knows the healing love of Jesus. Because you have done these things and many more, you have been His witness. Healing big and small. Glimpses of heaven. Fodder for our faith. Because of you people know hope.

In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand as God has abled you. Stand and walk into a life crafted by God, full of hope and promise. Stand up and walk through what presents itself as an obstacle. You have been raised up for the benefit of one another. Look upon one another with love. Meet each other at the corner of God's business. All paths lead there. Do so for the sake of Jesus Christ. Do so and help sustain the mystery that sustains us. Amen.