

In the fourteenth chapter of the Gospel of John, Jesus told His disciples that if they believed in Him, they would not only be able to do what He had done, but even greater things, and then He promised that He would send the Holy Spirit to lead and guide them. As promised the Spirit came at Pentecost, and the world and the Church have never been the same since. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, the disciples were given power to do many of the same things that Jesus had done, even performing miracles. This morning let's look at one of these early miracles by the disciples, and see what we can learn from this story. I am going to be reading from the third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, the first ten verses.

Read Acts 3:1-10

Ever had one of those moments when it seemed like the right time to do something, like Peter in this story? A lady had a parakeet named Chipper who sang all the time. One day while she was vacuuming her living room, she noticed that the bottom of Chipper's cage was dirty; so she decided it was a good time to clean it. She opened the cage (now don't get ahead of me), and stuck the nozzle of the vacuum cleaner into the cage and accidentally sucked Chipper right up into the vacuum cleaner. Frightened, she quickly turned the machine off, opened the bag and there was Chipper, shaken, dusty and dirty, but otherwise unharmed. She held him up and shook off the dust, but he was still dirty. So she ran to the kitchen and turned on the water in the sink. Holding Chipper under the faucet, she doused him with cold water. He started to shiver so she grabbed her hair dryer and blasted him with hot air. Later when she told this story, a friend asked how Chipper was doing. The woman replied: "Well, Chipper seems fine, except he doesn't sing much anymore, he just sits there in a daze, staring off into the room."

Some people are like that, just sitting there and going through life in a daze, just going through the motions, with no purpose and no enjoyment. Does this describe someone you know?

One day a highway patrolman was going down the Interstate and noticed a car going very slow in the right lane. It was going so slow that it was causing a back-up and an unsafe condition, especially considering how fast everyone drives on the Interstates here in New Mexico. So the officer pulled the car over. As he approached the car, he saw that it was full of Catholic nuns. The sister driving asked the officer what was the problem. He asked her why she was driving so slow, explaining that it was dangerous to drive too slow on the Interstate. She said that she was only following the speed limit posted on the signs. The officer said: "But you were only going 25 miles per hour and the speed limit on this section of the Interstate is 75 miles per hour." To which she replied: "But officer, all the signs say 25." "Sister, that's the designation of the Interstate route, this is I-25." Then he noticed that the three nuns in the back seat had a startled dazed look on their faces. So he asked the sister which highway they had been on

before they got onto the Interstate. She replied: “Oh, we came down State Highway 120.” She had been driving over 120 mile per hour.

Many people go through life like they are sitting in the back seat in a daze, following the lead of others who are taking them on a dangerous journey, misreading the signs. In many ways, this applied to the crippled man in our text this morning.

To properly understand this passage, we need to remember how people, especially the religious leaders, back then interpreted things. How they, too, misread the signs. They wrongly believed that if something bad happened to you, or you had an illness, it was because either you or your parents had sinned. They believed that it was God’s way of passing judgment on you for your sins. Thus, you could not do anything about it and others would not try to help you for fear of interfering with the wrath of God. So, for the crippled man in our story, it was assumed that he could not be healed; therefore, he must accept his fate and punishment in life. Thus he was destined to sit by the gate each day and beg for money; that was the only hope he had. While we should not interpret the signs of illness that way today, our society still misreads signs, passing judgment and telling people that there is no hope; just look at TV and the nightly news.

Then along came Peter and John, and they read the situation differently. They didn’t have any money to give, but they did have the love and hope of Jesus Christ to offer this man. Peter tells the man: “I don’t have a nickel to my name, but I can give you Jesus.” What a beautiful statement: “I don’t have much, but what I do have I will give you, I will give you Jesus Christ and the love and hope that only He can offer.” Peter did not give the man what he requested; instead he gave him what he needed the most. That’s how God answers our prayers.

So Peter told the man: “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, arise and walk.” Then Peter took the man by his right hand and raised him up. Raised him up. Did you hear that? This man experienced a sort of resurrection. He got a new life. Before Peter and John came along, he was destined to lie at that gate and beg for money; now he was able to stand on his own two feet. The text tells us that the man jumped to his feet and began to walk. He ran into the Temple courts and started dancing and praising God. He was dancing a jig; it was a song of resurrection. People came from all over the Temple area when they heard the commotion. The people were amazed because they had just seen this same man lying by the gate and now he was dancing up a storm all over the Temple.

Of course as the crowd gathered, Peter, like any good preacher, was not going to pass up an opportunity to share the Good News of Jesus Christ. In the remainder of Chapter 3, Peter tells the people that it is through faith in the name of Jesus that this miracle happened. Luke, the author of Acts, gives us a clear picture of the beggar’s condition; he was crippled from birth,

had to be carried to the gate each morning, and because of his condition, he was considered unclean by the religious leaders, and was not allowed to enter the Temple for worship. Thus he was restricted to sitting outside the Temple gate to beg for money. But Peter and John demonstrated that no one is outside the love of God. The coming of Jesus Christ reversed the notion that the poor, the lame, the blind, and the oppressed were outside the blessings of God.

Then Peter and John and the man walked hand in hand into the Temple. Don't you know that in heaven, Jesus must have been smiling, because the disciples finally got it; they finally understood what Jesus had taught them; what He promised when He sent the Holy Spirit.

In the brief time we have this morning, let me try and show you what Christ's love can do for each of us, like it did for this man. Let me give you a formula for living the Christian life. I'm going to give you the three key points right upfront and then discuss each one in some detail. Now they each end with a preposition, so I apologize to you English teachers:

1. First, self you can live with
2. Second, faith you can live by
3. Third, love you can live out.

First, self you can live with – society and the religious leaders of his day told the beggar that he could not be healed. He had sinned; thus, he was worthless; God had it in for him. On the other hand, Peter and John told the beggar differently. You are special; we care about you and God loves you.

Father Joe Keller had been a soldier in the Vietnam War, a successful football player, and even a singer in a rock group. He had led a colorful life, but God had other plans for him and called him into the priesthood. After seminary, he was assigned to a parish in the Bronx of New York City. One day as he looked out the window of his office, he saw a cab parked right in the crosswalk. Father Joe knew that this was unsafe for the kids who had to cross this busy intersection on the way to the church and school. So he went out and asked the cab driver to move. Well, this was New York City, and the cab driver cussed him.

Father Keller's past life rushed to the surface, and he grabbed the cabbie by the neck and shoved him up against the wall of the church and a fight broke out. Here was a Catholic Priest going at it with a cab driver right in front of his own church. After things settled down, Father Joe went back into the church upset with how he had reacted to the situation. He was cut to the heart; he must have felt like Peter did when Jesus looked straight at him after Peter had denied knowing the Lord for the third time.

And to top it all off, Father Joe had to go right in and lead mass with all this guilt, bitterness, and ugliness in his heart at that moment. He looked up at the cross in the sanctuary and realized that he had failed; that he had not loved his neighbor as Jesus had commanded. He felt unworthy to be a priest, a servant of the Lord. However, just then he had a visitor. It was Jazeman, a five year old girl who came each morning to get some milk and a snack before going

to school. She had written a poem for him. It said: "Dear Father Joe, I love you once; I love you twice; I love you more than a bowl of rice." It was a message from God. He loves each of us just as we are with all our faults and our failures. That's the good news of the Christian faith.

My friends, that's the power of the life, death, and resurrection of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ; we are all loved and no one, no one, is ever considered worthless to God. Remember He sent His only begotten Son to die for each one of us here this morning.

Next faith you can live by – two young men worked hard on their studies at Duke University, especially in their organic chemistry class. They had all A's on all their tests and had done great in their lab work. They only had to pass the final exam. But they got cocky and decided to party the night before the exam. As a result, they overslept and missed the exam. So they made up a lie and went to the professor and said that they had gone to the University of Virginia for additional research the day before, and had a flat tire on the way back and missed the exam. They asked if they could take a make-up exam which the professor reluctantly agreed to.

So they studied all night. The next morning, the professor put them in separate rooms and handed out the exam to each one. Question 1 on Page 1 was valued at 5 points and asked them to name the three radical formations of organic chemistry. That was is easy; they had studied all night. Then they each turned to Question 2 on Page 2 which was valued at 95 points. It asked: "Which tire was flat?" The lie had come back to haunt them.

Christianity is not just words; it is a lifestyle to live by. Peter and John showed the beggar this lifestyle; they showed him a living faith, a sharing faith, and the giving and healing that only Jesus Christ can do. We are each called to walk in faith knowing that God loves us and that no matter how bad the situation might be right now, God will provide as we discussed a few weeks ago; He will help us through whatever life throws our way.

Finally, love you can live out – a Sunday School teacher asked little Johnny: "What does the Bible teach us?" Johnny replied: "Love God and your neighbor 365 days a year and never take a day off." Now that's wisdom; as the Bible says, a little child shall lead them. Jesus calls us to love our neighbors and this command does not have any limits or restrictions to it. It applies to everyone we meet and is continuous, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 52 weeks per year, and thus a lifetime.

A business man was a Type A personality, driven, always focusing on doing his job and making a profit. But one morning, he decided to live that particular day in the Spirit of Jesus. Rushing to the commuter train, he accidentally bumped into a small boy carrying a puzzle box, knocking the pieces all over the sidewalk. Now normally, he would have said he was sorry and rushed to catch his train, but he remembered that he was living that day for Jesus. So he stopped and started helping the boy pick up the puzzle pieces. The boy saw that the train was starting to pull out of the station and said: "Mister, you're going to miss your train." The man realized that

he would miss a very important meeting, but said: "This is more important." Then the boy looked the man straight in the eye and asked: "Mister, are you Jesus?"

The man lying at the gate that day may have asked Peter and John the same question: "Are you Jesus?" Has anyone ever seen the love of Jesus in us, in our words, and actions? Has anyone ever wondered if we were Jesus?

My friends, in the name of Jesus Christ, the beggar at the gate was given a new life. In the name of Jesus, each one of us is offered the same opportunity for a new life: a life of self that you can live with; a life of faith that you can live by; and a life of love that you can live out. Let Jesus give your life purpose and joy; don't go through life in a daze. In the name of Jesus Christ, arise and walk in faith and love, and live the life that Christ has called us to. Then like the man at the gate, we too will want to dance a jig and praise God. Let's dance! Amen