

Our scripture text for this morning is taken from the third chapter of the Acts of the Apostles, verses 11 through 19. This is the second half of the story that Earlene/Ron read to you earlier.

Read Acts 3:11-19

At the Temple, Peter and John encountered a man who had been crippled since birth and had to beg for a living. They didn't have any money to give him, but they did have the love and hope that only Jesus Christ could offer to this man. Peter told the man: "I don't have 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 to you and the world." Peter did not give the man what he requested; instead he gave him what he needed the most. And that's what God always does for us.

Then Peter told the man: "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth arise and walk." Peter then took the man by his right hand and raised him up. Raised him up just like Jesus had raised Peter up when he was sinking in the Sea of Galilee. Do you see the significance in these words? This man experienced a sort of resurrection; he got a new life. Before Peter and John came along, this man was destined to lie at the gate and beg for money, but now he was able to stand on his own two feet. His whole life had been changed.

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. It was a song of resurrection. What a sight that must have been! People came from all over the Temple area when they heard the commotion. The people were amazed because they had just seen this same beggar lying by the gate, and now he was dancing up a storm all over the Temple. The emotions of the crowd ranged from amazement to confusion to suspicion.

Of course as the crowd gathered, Peter, like any good preacher, was not going to let an opportunity to share the Good News of Jesus Christ pass by. There is a typical outline for the sermons recorded in Acts and for the messages of the early church. First, there is an explanation of the events, such as in this case the healing of the beggar. Next there is the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ – His life, death and resurrection. And finally, there is a call to repentance and baptism.

Now Peter does not end his sermon on a depressing note. He pleads with the crowd to repent. Peter wants the crowd to understand that God offers humanity a second chance, an opportunity to change and reunite with God because of what Jesus Christ had done for them. Hope remains despite all the mistakes and sins of humanity. God provides each person the opportunity to change his or her mind, and to go in a new direction, and to be healed. As Peter gave this beggar a new life, so God offers a new life to all who will repent and return to Him. This is the good news at the heart of Peter's sermon and the gospel.

Repentance – now there’s a word that makes us all uncomfortable and sends chills up our backs. Some of you may have already started squirming in your seats and checking your watches, wanting to get out of here as fast as you can, hoping nothing rubs off on you. Repentance is not something that is discussed much in church these days, especially the Methodist Church, but it should be! Do you realize that without repentance there is no resurrection or salvation, and that the cross would be just another piece of old wood without any meaning. The word “repent” is so important that it occurs fifty-six times in the New Testament. Repentance is at the heart of the gospel.

A pastor was meeting with an elderly member of his congregation and they were discussing a relative of hers who had finally seen the light and joined the church after a lifetime of wild living. “Will my converted cousin’s sins be forgiven, Pastor?” she asked. “Oh, most certainly! Remember, the greater the sins, the greater the saint,” the pastor replied. The woman thought silently for a moment and then said: “Oh, Pastor, I wish I had known that fifty years ago!”

But what is repentance? What does it mean to you? The dictionary defines repentance as “recognizing the wrong in something you have done and being sorry about it; to change ways; to feel regret about a particular sin or past action and change your ways or habit.” Dwight L. Moody said that repentance is like the military term of “about face.” He said that “man is born with his back to God and repentance is turning square around.” The Hebrew word for “repentance” means “to turn around and go in the opposite direction.” Another definition of repentance is a change of mind arising from the sorrow of sin and leading to a transformation of our life. Sin separates us from God, but repentance brings us back to God.

A young woman repented and became a Christian. Someone asked her: “What were you before?” She said: “A sinner.” The person then asked: “What are you now?” She answered: “A sinner.” Of course the next question was: “What’s the difference?” She replied: “Before I was a sinner running **after** sin. But now, I’m a sinner running away **from** sin.” One of my former members in Socorro, Ron Smith described himself as a “recovering sinner!” I like that; I think it applies to us all. Have you ever thought of it like that; we are a body of “recovering sinners?”

Do we all need to repent? Are we any different from the people who Peter was talking to? Who is without sin? Not I, what about you; anyone here not sin this morning? Now I know that some of you may find this hard to believe, but preachers are not perfect, although I have met some who thought they were. A nice old lady was impressed by the new Methodist minister and wanted to compliment him as she was leaving church after the service. So she said to him: “I must say, Sir, that we folks didn’t know what sin was about until you were appointed here.”

Then there was the preacher who asked his congregation if they had ever known anyone who was perfect, without sin. No one said anything until a meek little man on the back row held his

hand up. The preacher asked him who that perfect person was and he replied: "Well, my wife keeps telling me her first husband was perfect."

But who is not in need of forgiveness? I definitely need it, what about you? As a matter of fact, we have all sinned and stand in the need of forgiveness. And that's where the Good News comes in. Christ died for us, to free us from the bondage of sin. Romans 5:8 states that "while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us." Two conditions are needed for forgiveness: repentance and faith. Because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our sins are forgiven. All we have to do is accept Jesus Christ into our hearts and all our sins are washed away by the blood that He shed on Calvary out of love for each one of us.

Does this mean that we will not sin again? No way, we are after all human and will make mistakes and have weak moments. The key is our attitude; if we have truly given our hearts to Jesus and our motives are right, then all we have to do is confess to God that we have messed up and because of His love for us, we will be forgiven. Remember Christians aren't perfect, just forgiven!

Now over the years, I have come across several misconceptions about repentance. Some people believe that all they have to do is say that they have repented and go on living the same old way without any visible change in their lifestyle. Billy Sunday said that the reason sin flourishes is because we treat it like a cream puff instead of a rattlesnake. But remember the earlier definition of repentance – it is not only a change of the mind but a transformation in your life, shedding the old bad habits and putting on new Christ-like habits.

Toward the end of the nineteenth century, Swedish chemist Alfred Nobel woke up one morning to read his own obituary in the local newspaper: "Alfred Nobel, the inventor of dynamite, who died yesterday, devised a way for more people to be killed in war than ever before, and he died a very rich man." Actually, it was Alfred's older brother who had died; and the newspaper reporter had printed the wrong name in the obituary.

But this experience had a profound impact upon Alfred. He decided that he wanted to be known for something other than developing a means to kill a lot of people and for amassing a fortune in the process. So he initiated the Nobel Peace Prize as an award for scientists and writers to foster peace. Nobel said: "Every man ought to have the chance to correct his epitaph in midstream and to write a new one." Few things will change us as much as looking at our life as though it was finished.

This leads us to the misconception that there is plenty of time to repent. Now some people are afraid that they will repent too soon. Why change right now and miss out on all the sinful pleasures of life. There was a lady in my Bible study back in Grants who told me about her brother who was leading a wild life. She tried to get him to change, but he said that he was

enjoying life too much. She asked him what he was going to do when he came face-to-face with God at final judgment, and he said that he was simply going to say "I'm sorry." Of course, it will be too late then. You can't repent too soon, because we never know when our time on this earth will be up.

The last misconception is that my sins are too great for God to forgive me – there's no way He can forgive all that I have done. But this is far from the truth. If your sins rise up before you like a dark mountain, bear in mind that the blood of Jesus Christ can cleanse all sin. There is no sin so big, or so bad, or so corrupt that the blood of Christ cannot cover. God's grace is sufficient, more than sufficient for us all.

Even though we often think of repentance as difficult or even painful, repentance is part of God's Good News. Repentance is not a burden; rather, it lifts the burden of sin that hinders our personal relationship with God. God promises to blot out our sins and give us a new life, an abundant life; a life beyond anything we have ever imagined.

Becoming a Christian is the greatest decision that we can ever make in our life. According to 1 Peter 2:9, God takes us "out of the darkness into His wonderful light." However, we can easily slide back into the darkness if we are not careful. Peter goes on in the fifth chapter of his letter to warn: "Your accuser, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour." Every day we face temptations and the opportunity to back-slide. The next time you feel tempted remember what Martin Luther said: "When the devil comes knocking at my door, I let Jesus Christ answer."

Being a Christian is a daily, ongoing experience; it is a life of repentance. It is a lifelong process of daily repentance and faith, turning from sin and seeking to live for Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit. Repentance is no casual matter. It involves self-examination, confession and commitment. It is a change of attitude toward sin as well as a change of action. This is where our free will comes in. Although we have accepted Jesus into our hearts, our old nature is still "alive and kicking." Our stubborn will still seeks to put our selfish and sinful desires ahead of Jesus. It's not easy to surrender our lives and our will to Jesus, but when we do it is as if everything finally falls into place. Instead of the stress and tension of a life out of tune with God, we discover the serenity of His presence. Who will control your life today? You or Jesus Christ?

In the name of Jesus Christ, the beggar at the gate was given a new life. In the name of Jesus Christ, each one of us is offered the same opportunity for a new life. In a minute, I will give the traditional invitation to Holy Communion in the Methodist Church which states: "Christ our Lord invites to His table **all** (that's everybody by the way) who love Him, who earnestly repent of their sin and seek to live in peace with one another." William Bennett once said that every

sinner has a future and every saint has a past. Use this opportunity as you come forward to give Jesus your future and put your sins in the past. Amen.