

But what I have, this I give to you!

Acts 3:1-10

It's not often that someone will say to a complete stranger "What I have this, I give to you!". What was being offered in this moment with Peter and John and the man? Was it charity? Was it healing? Was it pity? Compassion? Was it a miraculous healing? Or was it something else? When reading the scripture, it's always important to understand the story from a variety of perspectives. Whether it's historical or through the times in which it's happened, the economic circumstances, the literature, the way that it's been written. With these scriptural verses today we need to take into account the time in which it was written. What were considered miracles back in the times of the apostles are things that nowadays doctors and surgeons can generally do. We need to take into consideration the cultural practices and societal expectations. In this time a person who was not able to walk, as was the case with this man, would go to the gates of the temple seeking alms. Now the word alms is an old term for clothing, food, or money given to the people who were considered poor. The temple, or the gate of the temple, would have been the best location to receive alms because of the people going in. They often had hearts of gold and wanted to express compassion and would often be very generous. Which is why this is a better location. Another thing we should take into consideration is that at that time people who were blind and lame would have been considered ritually impure, unclean, and thus would not be permitted to go into the temple. Which again is why he was waiting outside the gate. With all of that in mind let's explore the story in more detail.

We first hear that Peter and John were heading into the temple at the hour of prayer. William Barclay notes, that for a devout Jew, there were three special hours of prayer. At 9:00, at noon, and at 3:00. It was agreed back then the prayer was powerful no matter where it was offered. So prayer didn't have to happen within the temple, it could happen in the street, it could happen at home, and that at any location it would still be as powerful. However, people felt that it was doubly precious if they were in the temple when they prayed, and I don't think we're any different. I think for many of us we know that prayer is powerful and can be done in any location, and yet when we're in the temple, the sanctuary, there's just something about it that feels a bit more special or powerful or strong. William Barkley also points out that Peter and John had continued with their spiritual practices from their Jewish roots while also living into this new faith. So they had always gone to the temple. After meeting Jesus though, Jesus took them out of the temple and into the street to do the ministry. So here they were, still practicing that while also living out their call from Jesus.

People would pass this man day in and day out where he was lame since birth. In fact, some of them probably would have passed by him several times a day as they came to pray. But for some reason

on this day, when he asked Peter and John for alms, Peter stopped and looked intently into his eyes. John also stopped and he too looked into the eyes of this man that was sitting at the gate. That is when Peter did something different, Peter invited the man to look at him. Peter was clear with the man that he had no money to give, no silver or gold, but then he said "But what I have, I give to you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. Stand up and walk." and the man then was lifted up by Peter and John he stood and began to walk. In fact, he leapt with joy. The man in that moment was transformed. As he entered the temple for the first time in his life, he praised God. He praised God for all that had happened in that moment and people around him in the temple were amazed and filled with wonder, truly was a miracle.

I began the service day by asking the question: What was it that Peter offered? What did Peter offer this man in that moment? When I hear that invitation from Peter to the man, when he said look at me, I feel that what was being offered was dignity, identity, and value. How many times have people simply walked by him? Averting their eyes and dropping a coin into his hand, not really knowing who he was. When I hear that invitation from Peter and John, I can't help but think about what they were offering, that it actually was Jesus offering the man. They were offering for him to be known. For him to know that he belonged, and that he was loved. After Jesus was resurrected the disciples received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and Peter chose to share this gift with the person who is in need. In the moment he shared humanity with the Holy Spirit being encountered in that exchange. What it brought that person was strength, relief, and healing. The reality is healing doesn't always happen in the way we expect and institutions, especially Faith institutions, have been famous for telling people who haven't been healed in the way they wanted, that they didn't have enough faith. That is untrue. That is not how this works. That is not how God works. God works through each and every one of us in different ways, and healing comes in many forms. Peter and John change that man's life. It wasn't about that he could stand, it was about the fact that he was now considered part of society. That he was valued. That he was worthy. No longer was he going to be left at the gate, no longer was he going to be passed by. God had lifted him up and given him hope. Jesus, when he was here on Earth, spent time breaking down barriers that divided people. Jesus taught people to strive for justice and move beyond charity to ensure that all people were treated equally. Jesus didn't act out of pity, Jesus acted out of love. Jesus saw the beauty in this man, Jesus saw this through Peter and John's eyes when they asked him to look at them. When we truly see each other, when we notice people, as Jesus does, and see their humanity, there is hope. One of the greatest gifts that we can give others is ourselves. One of the greatest gifts we can give to people who are suffering is to be with them and say "I am here with you. You are not alone. I see you. You are beautiful, you are loved, and you are truly a gift."

That is what God is calling each of us to do this day. So I want you to consider this story when you're out in the world. Look at one another, look at the people you typically would pass by. See the good in them. Help us live the transformation that Jesus wanted here on Earth. Thanks be to God. Amen.