

*Texts: Acts 3:1-10*

*Subject: Healing in Jerusalem*

*Theme: Look at Them*

Third Sunday of Easter; Apr. 26, 2020, *Online Worship; Reformation Lutheran Church, Las Vegas, NV*

Grace and peace to you from God our Father in heaven and the Risen Lord Jesus, Amen.

There was a time in history, when reading a newspaper was a major part of most daily routines. I know, it's hard to imagine now. You would walk to the end of a driveway or to a mailbox, or a newsstand or convenient store, purchase a stack of folded paper with print on it to find out what was happening in the world and in the community. It might sound strange to some of us. Maybe some of you still read the local paper daily, maybe just on Sundays, but more likely, not at all. Since 1990, circulation - the number of printed newspapers in the marketplace has decreased from 60 million to 30 million papers - a number not seen since before World War II. Newspaper circulation was in decline even before the internet was in most homes, and for nearly a decade before the advent of social media. I try not to look at my phone the second I wake up. But the truth is, I'm looking at the news and social media while I'm waiting for my coffee to brew. That's a big part of my morning routine. I want to know what's happening. Maybe we are online too much - but for our current reality - it's what connects us. We are forming community online, but it's no substitute for looking someone in the eye.

Face to face contact might be rare for us these days, and maybe that makes it more valued, more powerful. We teach our children to look someone in the eyes when they speak. It's central to how we learn to communicate. Without seeing the face of someone speaking, it's harder to know if they're talking to you. It's more difficult to understand tone and meaning. So now we have FaceTime, Zoom, and other video

calling methods - where we can see the face of the person we want to speak with, and *look at them* and understand them more. We can see who they are, their surroundings, and what's going on where they are. If we're not feeling presentable we can just decline the call. It's a powerful thing to look someone in the eyes, and have face to face contact. It's just one more thing we're missing these days, as we wait for the time we can be together physically again.

In the days after the Holy Spirit had shown up and fallen on the people, after three thousand were baptized, Peter and John were heading up to the temple to pray. The temple was the place where the people of God went to pray, but also to see others. They gathered there, and the 'Beautiful Gate' was a special entrance, a place where wealthier members or special guests might enter. It makes sense then, that those who were in need might choose that as a place to ask for help from folks that went into the temple that way. This man was unable to walk, so he had people carry him to the place where he could ask for a little money to survive. Collecting a small amount might be the difference between life and death for this man. He saw Peter and John. He noticed them. All we can know for sure is that he saw them as they were going into the temple, maybe just like anyone else, but we might wonder if after the coming of the Holy Spirit there was something different about them. Did their faces shine with the glory of God? Did they carry themselves differently after that transformative moment? How do you think they would have seemed to this man waiting at the temple gate?

The Las Vegas Strip is mostly empty. Not many cars are there, and you won't see people walking from one resort to another. But on other street corners around town, off the freeway in the parking lots at the grocery store, you might see people asking for

help. Maybe they look down at the ground and hold a sign, depressed or ashamed of having to beg for a living. To look someone in the eye and admit that you cannot take care of yourself - shouldn't be something that brings shame - it's actually a pretty brave thing to do, asking for help when we really need it. But that's the posture of someone who has been hurt, turned away, and left to fend for themselves for far too long. I notice that if I have a chance to stop and say hello, ask how their day is going, most folks will perk up a little, and maybe that's because they expect they'll receive some money. Maybe it's because many other people don't talk to them, won't acknowledge them, or don't treat them well. There are times of course when I do see those people asking for help in our midst, and probably a lot of the time, choose not to acknowledge them or give them attention. I expect they see me too.

The apostles said, "Look at us." The man at the gate fixed his attention on Peter and John. They might have been asking him to take notice of who he was speaking with. Maybe they had become well known in the city. They might have been asking him to look them in the eye. He expected to receive something. He didn't ask to be healed. But Peter says, "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." To be able to walk was to be able to work, likely to live and thrive in the society, to be welcomed into the temple in good health, and to give a living witness of the power of the Holy Spirit and even more. In Jesus' name, Peter commands him to stand up.

God's name is powerful. Remember: "You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain." Lutherans count it as the second commandment. Jews would count it as number three on the list. Luther taught that God's name is the one we call on when we pray,

praise and give thanks. Notice, that Peter commands the man to stand up and walk, not in the name of the *God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, but intentionally in the name of *Jesus Christ of Nazareth*. The apostles were teaching people to turn from their past, to repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus. When they're called to explain themselves, Peter will claim there is salvation in no other name (4:12). Peter is calling on the name of Jesus, in the power of the Spirit to bring about healing in this man, right there in front of the Beautiful Gate, for all to see.

When we pray, we pray in Jesus' name. Jesus taught His disciples, whatever you ask in my name, you will receive (*Jn. 14:13-14*)” There is power in the name of Jesus, who as we heard in last week's story has ascended - has gone to be with the Father in heaven. He has done what He promised, and sent the Holy Spirit to the people, calling them to be witnesses, and now Peter and John show up to do just that. They give something far more powerful than a few coins, but more than just shout a name and command the man to stand, they lend him a hand. They touch him, pick him up, and lead him into the temple. Once there, on strong feet and ankles, the man not only walks, but leaps, dances his way into the holy place. This man shows that he is fully healthy on the inside by the way he conducts himself on the outside. He gives witness to what God has done for him in the name of Jesus, through the power of the Spirit and the ones who believe. There are times when I'm not feeling so healthy on the inside - if I'm worried or afraid, or anxious. It shows. I might look down, or not go out, or speak differently.

Thanks be to God, then, that we can still be transformed too. We can still be healed. We can still see miracles in our lives, if we choose to open our eyes to *look at*

*them*. Others take notice, too, when we walk with the joy we have in Jesus, when we know that He is not dead, but alive and that He is with us, this world seems a lot less scary. People might see you and your friends walking by going, “look at them!” They see you.

There are people in need of healing in our community. In this time of Coronavirus there are far too many. But there are people who are sick with other diseases too, along with worry, fear, and anxiety. People are paralyzed by the pain of their past, and dying to be transformed. They might not even know they need it, and might be asking for something else entirely. There is a powerful Spirit in us, and the powerful name of Jesus we carry leads us to see the ones most in need. The Spirit leads us to look at them, to find them and meet them where they are, not to beat them up with our Bibles, but to call on the one who can truly transform us all and make us whole. The powerful name of Jesus is ours, since we’re united with Him in our baptism. We belong to him and He promises to always be near to us. We might not go around and yank people out of their wheelchairs, but it is a powerful thing just to spend a moment to look at them, to share our time and give a word of grace and blessing in Jesus’ name. Can we do that? The power in Jesus’ name *is* the power of the Gospel - the good news that Jesus who died on the cross rose again for us, and gave us the gift of salvation not because we deserved it, but because we needed it, and God wanted us to give it.

We need all the good news we can get, and the Gospel is the good news that meets us where we are and transforms us whether we ask for it or not - it produces changes we might not have ever expected *or signed up for*. As we grow, we move forward in faith, and live our lives of discipleship, in the tradition of Peter and John,

Mary, and the other disciples, we are given opportunities to share the powerful name of Jesus. We share it in our relationships, as we serve and heal and give, according to the gifts the Holy Spirit has planted in us.

It's happening now. In homes and hospitals, in live streaming church services, and on holy ground downtown, where people find what they need - a meal, shelter for a night, a meeting to help them stay clean and sober; where someone takes notice and looks them in the eye. Where people see each other beyond the disagreements and political lines we draw and fight over, to see that we truly are all in need of something and we find it in Jesus, in each other.

Right now we gather online, we communicate using video conferences, texts, emails, and phone calls. What use what we have, and *what we have we give* for the sake of those in need. What holds us together is not how many views or likes we receive on our videos, posts, or pages on social media, but the relationships we have built over time that are centered in God's grace-based love shown to us in Jesus. We will meet face to face. We are here for the heart of Christ, and we share it with one another and all our neighbors - especially those in need. As the church, we look each other in the eyes, share our joys, our concerns, our hurts, and our hallelujahs! We gather in every way to share the real life Jesus brings! Let's live in that love and look forward to that day we can dance and sing and pray and praise Him together. Amen.