

April 26, 2020

Acts 3:1-10

New Revised Standard Version (NRSV)

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

The Book of Acts or the Acts of the Apostles is believed to have been written by the same author as the gospel of Luke: presumably Luke – a disciple who traveled and worked with the apostle Paul. For many years we've thought of Acts as the sequel to Luke's gospel, but recent scholarship sees it more as the second half of the gospel. This is important as it switches the resurrection of Jesus from the climax of the story to the middle point, with the end of the story being incomplete, written by the way that we – as the Church today – continue the story.

Acts tells the unfolding story of the beginning of the church, moving from the disciples following the resurrection, to the emergence of the church in Jerusalem around the Temple and then as it spread outwards towards the ends of the world of the Roman Empire. It begins with Peter and the other apostles, before switching to focus upon the work of Paul as he witnessed to the good news gospel of Jesus of Nazareth among the Gentile (or non-Jewish) peoples of the Roman Empire. While it does tell the story of the beginning of the Church – it focuses on the church that emerged from the ministry of Paul as opposed to the other branches of Christianity that emerged in Israel, Egypt, in the middle East and even all the way to India. Paul's version of Christianity, testified to in the Epistles (or letters to the ancient churches) has become the dominant form of Christianity.

at three o'clock, this was the hour of prayer which accompanied the evening sacrifice. It shows that the emerging Church continued worshipping and participating in the Temple.

lame from birth – this meant not only that the man was handicapped physically but also spiritually and communally. Because of his physical state he could not fully participate in Temple worship as a full member of the community as per Leviticus 21:16-23.

¹⁶ The Lord spoke to Moses, saying: ¹⁷ Speak to Aaron and say: No one of your offspring throughout their generations who has a blemish may approach to offer the food of his God. ¹⁸ For **no one who** has a blemish shall draw near, **one who is blind or lame**, or one who has a mutilated face or a limb too long, ¹⁹ or one who has a broken foot or a broken hand, ²⁰ or a hunchback, or a dwarf, or a man with a blemish in his eyes or an itching disease or scabs or crushed testicles. ²¹ No descendant of Aaron the priest who has a blemish **shall come near to offer the Lord's offerings by fire**; since he has a blemish, he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. ²² He may eat the food of his God, of the most holy as well as of the holy. ²³ But he **shall not come near the curtain or approach the altar**, because he has a blemish, **that he may not profane my sanctuaries**; for I am the Lord; I sanctify them.

the Beautiful Gate – this was one of the gates within the Temple (think of Psalm 100-

¹ Make a joyful noise to the Lord, all the earth.

² Worship the Lord with gladness;
come into his presence with singing.

Know that the Lord is God.

It is he that made us, and we are his;

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

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.

QUESTIONS FOR THE PRACTICE OF EXAMEN & CONTEMPLATION

- **What part of today's story grabs you?**
- **Where have you experienced what the Celtic Tradition calls a "thin place", like the Temple, where Heaven and Earth seem to meet and God can more easily be seen, heard or experienced?**
- **How are we in a thin place today in this time of pandemic? How are you – or we – possibly being allowed a fuller sight of God?**
- **How are we called to be the hands & feet of Christ: God's transformation of the power of death that isolate and oppress people, in our world?**

we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture.

⁴ Enter his gates with thanksgiving,
and his courts with praise.
Give thanks to him, bless his name.

⁵ For the Lord is good;
his steadfast love endures forever,
and his faithfulness to all generations.)

Scholars are unsure which of the gates within the Temple it exactly is, but it's description as "beautiful" points to Nicanor Gate which led from the Cour of the Women to the Court of the Gentiles. The ancient Jewish historian Flavius Josephus described it as "made of Corinthian bronze which distinguished from the other temple gates which had silver and gold overlays).

raised him up; ... Jumping up, We see the healing of the man from seeming death (he's as good as dead in the culture and religious structure of the Temple) as a progressive transformation, which echoes the language pointing to the Messiah in Isaiah 35.

¹The wilderness and the dry land shall be glad,
the desert shall rejoice and blossom;
like the crocus ² it shall blossom abundantly,
and rejoice with joy and singing.
The glory of Lebanon shall be given to it,
the majesty of Carmel and Sharon.
They shall see the glory of the Lord,
the majesty of our God.

³ Strengthen the weak hands,
and make firm the feeble knees.

⁴ Say to those who are of a fearful heart,
"Be strong, do not fear!
Here is your God.
He will come with vengeance,
with terrible recompense.
He will come and save you."

⁵ Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened,
and the ears of the deaf unstopped;
⁶ then the lame shall leap like a deer,
and the tongue of the speechless sing for joy.
For waters shall break forth in the wilderness,
and streams in the desert;

⁷ the burning sand shall become a pool,
and the thirsty ground springs of water;
the haunt of jackals shall become a swamp,
the grass shall become reeds and rushes.

⁸ A highway shall be there,
and it shall be called the Holy Way;
the unclean shall not travel on it,
but it shall be for God's people;