

Search and Rescue

November 1, 2020
Week 11

Acts 3:1-10

(Series: Reimagining Church; Message Eleven)

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. ²Now a man who was lame from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. ³When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. ⁴Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” ⁵So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.

⁶Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” ⁷Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. ⁸He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. ⁹When all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Message:

We’re re-imagining the 21st century Church in light of the 1st century Church. We’re imagining what the Church might look like, actually should look like, if we take the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our life and faith community seriously.

So after a couple of introductory messages on praying and waiting, we spent the first month (September) talking about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Last month (October) we focused on the early Church’s *Rule of Life* - i.e., the practices of the early Church that kept them walking close to Jesus and empowered by His Spirit. We noted the early Church was fully devoted to the *apostle’s teaching* (i.e., to the Gospel, Word, Text), fully devoted to the *fellowship* (to the community, to life together), fully devoted the *breaking of bread* (calling people together around a table of forgiveness, grace, and blessing), and fully devoted to prayer (for God’s Church, Mission, and Kingdom). We noted it wasn’t multiple choice, it was “all of the above!”

This month, we’ll be looking at the Church’s mission. What is the purpose of “Church?” What is the work, duty, task of Church members (or what the early Church called “disciples”?)

My son Brian was a firefighter. Periodically, he'd be assigned Search and Rescue. While most people run out of a burning building, search and rescue is counter-intuitively running into the burning building looking for people who may be trapped, injured, or overcome by smoke. They go in equipped with an air tank and special equipment (e.g., Brian carried a wire cutter because he'd occasionally become tangled in wires).

They have no idea what they might encounter; inevitably there's a surprise waiting. He's been in flashovers, been hit by water stream, had a roof collapse on him, and fallen through stairs. It was dangerous; but he went anyway. He was well trained; he's practiced regularly. It was his duty. He's saved numerous lives.

This passage is an incredible and insightful story about Peter, John and a beggar.

- It illustrates a **change** in Peter and in this man crippled in both body and spirit...
- It illustrates the **implications** of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ...
- It illustrates the **transforming power** of the Holy Spirit given in the previous chapter...
- It illustrates the **calling/mission** of the early (and present) day Church...
- It illustrates how ordinary people like Peter and John (and you and I) can become bold and **fearless** in **witnessing** to and sharing the Good News of the Gospel.

(Okay, I know, it just got personal! Some of you are now uneasy, some beginning to squirm, some feeling a massive wave of guilt. Some are already irritated - Here we go again!)

So what if we leveled the playing field with one massive confession: How many of you have had an opportunity where you could've shared your faith and wimped out like the Cowardly Lion in the Wizard of Oz (Let's see a show of hands! Just kidding. How many of you would have raised your hands but were too timid?)

How many of you have ever been in a conversation that turned to spiritual things and you felt God prompting you to say something, but it felt awkward so you didn't do it (If you have, just remain seated).

If you've ever been used by God to lead someone to Jesus, there's no bigger thrill! You'll talk about it; and you'll eagerly look forward to the next opportunity.

This is a story about a cowardly lion who talked tough with a lot of false

bravado. Then when the going got hard, he bailed. His name was Peter.

Jesus said, *“You’re all going to run away from me.”* Remember Peter’s response: *“Not me. Everybody else might, but I’m not going anywhere.”*

Then the soldiers came. And Peter disappeared. When he garnered enough courage to watch Jesus from a distance; he was so afraid they would discover him, he panicked and swore he didn’t even know Jesus three times.

The Peter from that story is actually the same Peter we find in this story, but you hardly recognize him - something has dramatically changed - he now has the Holy Spirit - and the Spirit makes all the difference.

This morning we’re going to look at five characteristics of these first **disciples** of Jesus.

FIRST, THEY WENT TO THE TEMPLE TO PRAY

There is nothing in the text to indicate this was anything but an ordinary day. It wasn’t Sabbath; it was not the first day of the week; it was not National Day of Prayer.

So why are Peter and John going to the temple at 3:00 in the afternoon? Because it is just what they did. **Prayer** marked their life. It is what they had always done - every day; twice a day according to Jewish custom; it was deeply imprinted in their DNA.

2:46 - *“Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts.”*

The early church, as we noted last Sunday, was a praying church and **Acts 3:1** is an illustration of the disciple’s keeping the Church’s rule of life; of coming together to pray.

But, and don’t miss this, what was once a friendly place is now a bit hostile. They are going to a place where most of the people don’t believe Jesus was Messiah.

SECOND, THEY WENT TO THE TEMPLE; i.e., THEY WENT INTO THE FIRE

Jesus had been arrested, tried, crucified and buried. The disciples had huddled together. When they first heard about Jesus’ resurrection, it seemed too good to be true; some were not quite sure they believed the initial reports.

John writes: *“On the evening of the first day of the week, when the disciples were together, with the doors locked for fear of the Jewish leaders...Jesus comes”* (**John 20:29**)

They are in a room; the doors are locked; they are afraid of the Jewish (and Roman) leaders. The leaders were hostile to Jesus; and Jesus had said, *“If they persecute me, they will persecute you.”* (**John 15:20**) (Translated: If they killed

me, they'll kill you.")

If you were afraid of the Jewish leaders, where is the one place you would make sure you didn't go? The **Temple**. It's full of Jewish leaders.

Where do they go? The Temple. They step into the heat. Why?! Because the Spirit had come. Because it is what followers of Jesus do. They go where people don't know Jesus - search and rescue!

The early "church" - empowered by the Spirit - met in the temple court; they were no longer behind closed, locked doors; they were directly in the fire.

They now had the power of the Holy Spirit and they understood they were on a search and rescue mission. Peter's **passion** for **Jesus** transforms him from a cowardly lion to an emboldened disciple. He longs for more to be added to the Kingdom; he is learning that everyone matters to God.

THIRD, THEY MEET THIS MAN WHO HAS BEEN LAME SINCE BIRTH. HE CAN'T WALK

Luke tells us in Acts 4:22, this lame man is forty years old (Forty years ago, Jimmy Carter was president of the United States)

In forty years, he has never stood up straight; never walked, never run; and probably never entertained thoughts that he would. Instead, every day he came to the temple gate to hold out his hand (and cup) **hoping** someone would give him some money so he could eat. Think about that - living everyday with no hope for a better tomorrow.

Everyday he would watch people walk by and go into the Temple to worship and praise God. He had never been; he was not allowed in - he was considered **unclean**.

But the Temple gate was the best place for (his) business; religious people were supposed to give alms; so the odds of getting a donation were significantly higher by a temple gate.

Maybe he had seen Jesus and wondered why he healed others - but not him; maybe Jesus had seen him; maybe Jesus had passed by him before and inwardly smiled: "*Not now, my friend, my Father is saving you for later...and it will be amazing!*" ("*He makes everything beautiful in His time.*")

But if he couldn't walk, how did he get to the temple every day for decades? Answer: Someone had to bring him. Someone had to carry him. He was totally **dependent** on others (we don't know how many friends he had...but he must have had at least one).

Did his friend(s), have other things to do? Absolutely! But every day, week after week, month after month, year after year for decades he (or she) made room in their schedule to bring him to the Temple, to God's house and then

bring him home again.

What if he/she had missed today? “My son has a soccer game; sorry, can’t help you” “My daughter has a piano lesson; can’t help today!” “That’s Wednesday, that’s my golf day...”

But someone cared enough to bring him every day and get him back home, year after year even though it didn't seem to make much difference.

*Is there a **beggar** in your life? Someone you are willing to be inconvenienced by to faithfully bring him/her to God’s house?*

*“Is Covenant Church the kind of place you’d bring your **unchurched** (hurting, needful, hopeless) **friend**?”*

*“Is Covenant Church a place where someone who is **wounded** can find **healing**; where someone who is lonely would find community; where someone who is discouraged would find hope?”*

It sounds like this beggar is a regular at the Beautiful Gate; he and many others like him...

But on this day, he catches the eye of Peter and John on their way to their prayer meeting. As they walk by, he reaches out his cup and asks for money - just like he’s does a thousand times every day - millions of times already in his life - assuming the same rejection he’s received almost as many times.

People are so accustomed to the beggars (they’re still there by the Temple if you visit today), most just walk by; they’ve learned to not even make eye contact. They’re just a part of the scenery.

Peter and John have been to the Temple many, many times and “missed” him; but today is different. Today, the Holy Spirit opened their eyes.

Today, Peter stops and looks straight at lame beggar and says, “Look at us.” The lame man is thinking, “Ah, I look at you and the others who walk by all day; you’re the ones who don't look at me. But, maybe, *finally, someone is going to give me something!*” He looks up at Peter and John. His ears anticipate sounds in his cup.

But then Peter says, *“I don’t have silver or gold, but what I do have I give you”* (Oh, Great! Really! Talk about disappointment “Gold and silver is what I need. I have to eat!” “What else you got? Advice - yah, I don’t need it! I’ve heard it all before!”)

But Peter didn’t offer any advice; he said, *“In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk!”* And he reaches down and grabs his hand and pulls him up. Luke writes, **(3:7b-8)** *“Instantly, the man’s feet and ankles become strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.”*

Amazingly, he doesn't even have to learn to walk, he **just walks!** But that’s

not all, in moments he is not only walking; he's jumping; he's leaping.

Imagine the **joy** - after forty years of abandonment and ridicule; after forty years of confinement and loneliness; after forty years of **embarrassment** and **begging**.

When people recognized this leaping man as the lame beggar they are amazed and filled with wonder!

Now don't forget to put the pieces of this puzzle together... Just like they did every day, Peter and John go to the temple to pray. Like his friend(s) did every day, he (they?) brought this lame man to the temple gate. And just like the **Holy Spirit** does all the time, he brings them together and a **miracle** occurs. They were full of the Spirit's **power**. Faithfulness and obedience cross paths with love and grace and God is **praised!**

FOURTH: THEY OFFER THE BEGGAR A GIFT (Jesus)

As incredible as this gift of healing is, the greatest gift in this story Peter has to offer is not a lame man walking - it's not the main thing. It is not the physical healing; it is not the emotional healing; it is **Jesus Christ**; it is the spiritual healing; it is life and destiny transformation.

There is an old story - presumed to be true: Pope, Innocent II, as he was showing Thomas Aquinas through the Vatican and some of the great treasures and wealth of the church, said, "The church no longer has to say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'" Aquinas is said to have responded, "True, but nor can the church any longer say, *'In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.'*"

The greatest gift the Church has to offer is Jesus Christ. What the Church must offer is Jesus! It's not our money, stuff, buildings, programs, or our advice the world needs; the world needs Jesus - crucified for our sins, risen for our forgiveness.

We should be praying about that - for people to have (more of) Jesus, for the lost, for the harvest. The Bible goes to great lengths to portray God's heart for the **lost**; this is just one story. Jesus says it is why he came (**cf. Mark 2:17; Luke 5:32**). And the disciples loved to talk about Jesus.

Bible also says God is looking for **people** who have **his heart** for the lost - people who are willing to help "beggars" (i.e., people with needs) to **persuade** them they need Jesus.

This lame beggar never dreamed that he would come to the Temple unable to walk and leave leaping and praising God. But today, he had met Jesus, and his life was changed dramatically, undeniably, eternally.

Let me ask a question: What do you think Jesus wants to change in you

right now? Today! Now! Before you go home?

You came with a need this morning - fact is, we all have needs. Maybe a spiritual issue, a secret sin, a character deficiency, a temptation you're struggling with, a decision that needs to be made, a relationship that needs to be reconciled, a pain that needs to be touched, a heart that needs a ray of hope! We are all beggars.

Maybe you came in hardly able to walk; look at Jesus. He can/will change you. Don't leave without encountering him. Don't leave without accepting the blessings he wants to refresh you with.

Let me ask a second question: Are you available to carry someone else to Jesus? Peter and John were intentional about being around people who needed Jesus; the lame man's friend was faithful in bringing him to the Temple... If you are, we'll teach you; we'll provide you opportunities; and God will use you.

FIFTH, GOD BLESSES HIS PEOPLE

Years ago, when Brian was almost 5 and Joel almost 3, we were shopping in the mall - Kohl's. Suddenly Joel disappeared. We called his name - nothing! We panicked. We looked around, nothing! I said to Marilyn, "It's okay, we still got Brian." "We're good!" 😊

But she didn't agree. We started searching! We notified store personnel; we looked up and down the clothes aisles with a great sense of urgency!

Then after what could easily serve as a definition of *eternity*; he jumps out from the middle of this circular clothes rack with a big smile on his face: "Ta dah!" I thought about strangling him and hugging him all at the same time; but Marilyn was already hugging him.

Peter and John were on a search and rescue **mission** for the lost people they were **praying** for...for those who **matter** to God - his sons and daughters, our future brothers and sisters. They were present to people and God used them to transform lives.

As we read on in this chapter, we'll discover Peter uses this encounter to talk more about how Jesus transforms people's lives forever. As a result of the disciples call to repentance, the Church continues to grow.

There is an obscure prophecy in Isaiah 35:4,6 - "*Be strong and do not fear, your God will come. . . .he will come to save you. . . .then will the lame leap like a deer.*" Isaiah spoke this prophecy about 750 B.C. (They looked around and said, God hasn't yet come to save...no lame a leaping...). In 749 B.C., God still hadn't come...

They had been waiting over 750 years, wondering "*Is God ever going to*

come; will he ever save?" Maybe Isaiah got his wires crossed? Maybe he didn't hear it right?

Then one day, at 3:00 in the afternoon, after almost 800 years of waiting, this prophecy is **fulfilled**. Jesus has come to **save** his **people**. Jesus is the ultimate search and rescuer.

Peter and John, Christ's disciples, following in their master's footsteps,; his presence marked their life; they obeyed the Spirit and joined the search and rescue **missions**. And as his disciples, that is our mission as well - search and rescue (It can be dangerous, but we need to go anyway - it is our calling! People's lives and eternity depends on it).

This **lame man** is **leaping** like a deer is (further) **proof** that Jesus has come to save his people - Israel saw it that day. Now the whole world needs to...

By Pastor Doug Kamstra on November 1, 2020
Covenant CRC
7171 Willard Ave SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49548
(616) 455-5120 | info@covenant-crc.org