

I Know that My Redeemer Live (Acts 3)

Sunday, August 14, 2022

I'm going to cheat this week. This summer we are talking about the miracles of Jesus. But instead of talking about a miracle from the Gospels – the biographies of Jesus; Matthew, Mark, Luke and John – I'm going to cover a miracle in the book of Acts.

This is a miracle that, in a way, doesn't involve Jesus. He's not standing there, physically present as a man is healed and made to walk again. This takes place after Jesus has completed his earthly ministry, been crucified, risen again, and ascended to the Father. It's Peter and John that interact with the man who cannot walk. It's Peter who gives the command, "Walk!"

But really, this still is a miracle of Jesus. Peter does this "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." He commands the man to walk in the power and authority of Jesus' name. Peter denies credit for the miracle, saying that it is entirely the result of Jesus. He's not giving Jesus in that fake humble way. ("Oh, it's not me. It's the Lord.") He is saying that this is Jesus at work.

As with all the miracles we have seen so far this summer, no miracle of Jesus is simply a case of Jesus just being helpful. Yes, he is changing people's quality of life. Yes, he is making the impossible possible. Yes, he is demonstrating the goodness, grace, and love of God. But there is always something to be learned in each of these miracles, some deeper truth or mystery Jesus is revealing. The same is true of Acts 3 as well. As amazing as a man who cannot walk walking again is, there is something more going on here.

We're going to look at this story through **Two Filters**.

1. The first filter is Jesus' audacious statement spoken to his disciples. Jesus said, **"Anyone who has faith in me will do even greater things than these because I am going to the Father."** (John 14:12) Jesus says this as he tells his followers he will be physically leaving them. The full quote is, "I tell you the truth, anyone who has faith in me will do what I have been doing. He will do even greater things than these, because I am going to the Father." Does that sound crazy to anyone else? Or just me? This is Jesus – amazing teacher, miracle worker. "Even the wind and the waves obey him!" This is Jesus, who not long after this will be crucified and raised from the dead three days later. Jesus' followers are going to do the same things he has been doing? No, his followers will do EVEN GREATER things than he has been doing! His followers will surpass the things that the disciples with their own eyes got to see Jesus do!
2. The second filter is he continued commitment of the followers of Jesus to a risen Jesus. Before he was crucified, Jesus predicted that his disciples would scatter and run away when he was arrested, tried and killed. Quoting the prophet Zechariah Jesus said, **"I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered."** (Matthew 26:31) And he was right. Jesus was arrested and tried, and his disciples all ran away and hid. They denied knowing him. They hid away after his death. They assumed he was going to be killed, and they assumed the same fate awaited them. BUT what if the disciples had all the confidence that Jesus was no longer dead? What if they saw him with their own eyes, and touched him with their own hands. What if they knew that Jesus fulfilled everything that he said he was going to do? That inspires a whole different kind of action and confidence, doesn't it? There might actually be something to this claim that Jesus rose from the dead.

Peter and John are Holy Spirit filled, empowered followers of Jesus. Peter and John, knowing the commission Jesus gave him – “you will do the same and even greater things than I did” -- encounter the man outside the Temple, asking them for money. Peter and John look straight at him, and offer what they can give. They can give healing, because Jesus empowered them to. And they can continue the healing ministry of Jesus because they are committed to continue his work.

Peter speaks “Walk!” in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. They take the man by the right hand, help him up, and instantly his feet and ankles become strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them to the temple courts, walking, and jumping and praising God. People see him, recognize him, and are in awe and wonder of what has happened to him.

The healing is evidence that Jesus’ work continues. The things that Jesus began to do, the disciples are continuing.

The healing is evidence that Jesus is ALIVE! When Peter heals the man who can’t walk “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth”, he is not doing so in the name of a dead guy. He’s doing this in the name of a resurrected, risen-again, fully alive Jesus, Son of God, Saviour. When attention is drawn to the man, Peter speaks of Jesus. He speaks of Jesus in the present tense. He speaks of Jesus not as that teacher that was crucified a few months back. He speaks of Jesus as resurrected, alive – available to help them repent, turn to God, and be forgiven.

The miracles of Jesus clearly continue according to the book of Acts. The miracles here prove the resurrection really happened, and that the work he began bombastically continues. So for this miracle, being the first one in the book of Acts, WHERE the miracle takes place is very important. **The healing takes place outside of the Temple.** Again, this is the first miracle profiled in the book of Acts. And it does not take place in the building of God’s assumed presence. It takes place outside of the symbol of the presence of God among the people.

Luke is credited as the author that writes both the Gospel of Luke and the book of Acts. The Gospel of Luke is the life and ministry of Jesus, including his death and resurrection. Acts is the outcome the life, ministry, death and resurrection of Jesus. In the book of Luke, Jesus begins his ministry in the Temple. In Acts that ministry has expanded beyond the Temple into other places. Jesus begins his ministry in Jerusalem and in the Temple. Acts takes Jesus’ ministry beyond the Temple and rapidly throughout the world.

People would have had a very specific idea of where God “belonged” and the people that God “belonged” to. God belonged to Israel! God belonged in the Temple! But Jesus demonstrates that God will not be contained and will not be restricted.

We can nod our heads in agreement and think, “those silly ancient people! Thinking God belonged only to them!” But we do the same thing. We think Jesus is only aligned with a certain kind of Christian and a certain kind of belief and a specific form of worship. We speak of our church as “God’s house” as if this is only place where we come and meet God. And while I certainly do hope that Jesus is meeting us here as we gather, the reality expressed in this healing miracle and repeated over and over again through Jesus and the early church is that Jesus Christ of Nazareth is at work everywhere, and is not restricted to certain places, certain people or certain practices.

When I was in seminary I took a course on Christianity and culture. An assignment in that course was to observe one of two religiously themed Canadian paintings. The painting I did a reflection paper on was by **Jean Paul Lemieux, Lazarus (Lazare), 1941.**

There were a number of things that caught my attention. The first was the church. It's a prominent building, it's full of people. The priest or minister sticks out clearly. But if you look in the church, everyone looks bored. Falling-over bored. What-am-I-doing-with-my-Sunday bored.

As I look at the picture, where is Jesus? He's not even in the church building. At all. He's up on the hill, with the mourners at the grave. He's raising Lazarus from the dead. He is clearly absent from the church building but is present with the people that know their need for him. The church goers are bored to death. The resurrected Jesus is raising Lazarus from the dead to new life.

Jesus is continually on the move. Jesus certainly wants to be at work in our church, but he is certainly not restricted to it. And if he's not welcomed at the church, he'll simply go elsewhere. The resurrected Christ is alive everywhere. Can we see it? Or will we settle for what is familiar and what we know?

Back to the story: it is amazing that a man that could not walk could walk again. He had abilities to provide for himself and quality of life that he did not have previously. But there was so much more to this miracle. There were deeper things going on. The healing of this man showed:

Jesus' ministry and power continued.

Jesus is alive!

Jesus' first action is outside the Temple.

NT Wright's book *Acts for Everyone* was very helpful in thinking through this passage. Wright notes, about this story and about the movement of God in general, **"God is on the move, not confined within the institution, breaking into new worlds. . ."** (NT Wright)

As Peter and John heal this man, and explain the miracle, they show: **"The good news of Jesus . . . Is starting to reach outside to anyone and everyone who needs it"** (NT Wright)

As true as these things were for the disciples, they are true for us today.

Jesus is alive!

Jesus is on the move. So . . .

Be alert! Join Jesus where he is at work.

When is Jesus on the move in your family? Friends? Your neighbourhood? Your work? Your school? Your teams? Your volunteer opportunities?

Where – and this may be a stretch – is Jesus even at work in our church?

Pray that the Spirit of God reveal to you where Jesus is at work. Ask for wisdom for what you ought to do.

The people you have dismissed as well beyond the reach of Jesus are much closer than you think. Jesus may already be among them in a way that we don't yet see. The communities that we dismiss as beyond the reach of Jesus are closer than you think. Jesus may already be among them. The people we avoid, Jesus seeks. The places we avoid, Jesus seeks.

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Jesus is on the move.

Be alert! Join Jesus where he is at work.