

## Acts | The Incendiary Fellowship

### The Hurdle

Acts 3

5.15.16

*Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, the hour of prayer. <sup>2</sup> And a man who had been lame from his mother's womb was being carried along, whom they used to set down every day at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, in order to beg alms of those who were entering the temple. <sup>3</sup> When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he began asking to receive alms. <sup>4</sup> But Peter, along with John, fixed his gaze on him and said, "Look at us!" <sup>5</sup> And he began to give them his attention, expecting to receive something from them. <sup>6</sup> But Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you: In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene-- walk!" <sup>7</sup> And seizing him by the right hand, he raised him up; and immediately his feet and his ankles were strengthened. <sup>8</sup> With a leap he stood upright and began to walk; and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. <sup>9</sup> And all the people saw him walking and praising God; <sup>10</sup> and they were taking note of him as being the one who used to sit at the Beautiful Gate of the temple to beg alms, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.*

<sup>11</sup> *While he was clinging to Peter and John, all the people ran together to them at the so-called portico of Solomon, full of amazement. <sup>12</sup> But when Peter saw this, he replied to the people, "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this, or why do you gaze at us, as if by our own power or piety we had made him walk? <sup>13</sup> "The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified His servant Jesus, the one whom you delivered and disowned in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release Him. <sup>14</sup> "But you disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, <sup>15</sup> but put to death the Prince of life, the one whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses. <sup>16</sup> "And on the basis of faith in His name, it is the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man whom you see and know; and the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect health in the presence of you all. <sup>17</sup> "And now, brethren, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did also. <sup>18</sup> "But the things which God announced beforehand by the mouth of all the prophets, that His Christ would suffer, He has thus fulfilled. <sup>19</sup> "Therefore repent and return, so that your sins may be wiped away, in order that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord; <sup>20</sup> and that He may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you, <sup>21</sup> whom heaven must receive until the period of restoration of all things about which God spoke by the mouth of His holy prophets from ancient time. <sup>22</sup> "Moses said, 'THE LORD GOD WILL RAISE UP FOR YOU A PROPHET LIKE ME FROM YOUR BRETHREN; TO HIM YOU SHALL GIVE HEED to everything He says to you. <sup>23</sup> 'And it will be that every soul that does not heed that prophet shall be utterly destroyed from among the people.' <sup>24</sup> "And likewise, all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors onward, also announced these days. <sup>25</sup> "It is you who are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'AND IN YOUR SEED ALL THE FAMILIES OF THE EARTH SHALL BE BLESSED.' <sup>26</sup> "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways."*

Starting a few weeks ago we began looking at the Book of Acts (Acts of the Apostles or Acts of the Holy Spirit through the Apostles).

We think of this season as the "season of the Spirit" here at St. Andrews. This is the season of Pentecost (TODAY is Pentecost Sunday) and so, normally at this time of the year, following

Easter and through the Summer, we look at the Third Person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit and His work in the Church...and THIS Book of Acts is just that...how the Spirit and the Gospel moved the church and built the church in the 1<sup>st</sup> C.

Today, WE follow two disciples of Jesus Christ, as THEY follow Jesus. The Apostles, Peter and John go, as their Rabbi used to go, to pray...in the Temple at Jerusalem. They are praying with their eyes open (as Richard Pratt wrote)... These disciples are aware – they are “in the moment” as we’d say today. They see things and they want others to see those things. Something of cataclysmic significance is happening and they are aware of it...still have a lot to learn...but they’re beginning to see...and helping others to see. A new awareness is taking hold.

Awareness is a big thing today...we are the most informed generation ever and yet we are horribly distracted and have a very difficult time being “present” (and it’s NOT just the younger people – older people too have a hard time handling technology): we’re over-stimulated and unaware and yet the Gospel can save us, refresh us and help us be aware, be present, and be refreshed and be awake to what God is doing in the world.

There are words/ideas/truths repeated in this text that can help us. Let’s look at: 1) Awareness 2) Movement and 3) Presence

It had been an especially sweet time for these disciples. Their crushing disappointment at seeing their Teacher die...was replaced with jubilation at seeing Him alive. They spent 40 days with the Risen Man...He spoke to them about the Kingdom of God – they soaked in it. They were told to wait for a gift...

Then the Day of Pentecost – the Spirit is poured out on all humanity; Babel is reversed. What the Prophets foretold for centuries is NOW unfolding right before their eyes. A new community of the Spirit is formed and there’s love and sharing and joy and...and then they hit a bump in the road.

All 3000 new believers in Jesus Christ are “Day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house (2.46).” They’re all Jewish. And believing in Jesus Christ has only made them feel more Jewish than ever... And they’re liked by their fellow, Jewish, Temple-goers... So far so good.

But the Temple... for all it’s beauty and majesty and history...as the “axis-mundi” (the center of the world) the Temple is not the nucleus/hub that it was... And the disciples have begun to see that.

And as they approach the Temple, the Beautiful Gate, these magnificent 75-foot-high, ornate Corinthian Brass double doors...they see a kind of sign of the Temple’s deficiency. A man sits there begging.

Truth is: a lot of beggars are there. It's a hot-spot for people who are in need. And THIS man sits outside the Temple gate with so many others at 3:00 in the afternoon because he is not allowed in...because he is disabled...and there could be no priest who could enter the inner precincts of the Tabernacle/Temple if he had any of a whole list of diseases or disabilities. And those prohibitions (Lev 21; Deut 15) were probably widely applied not just to priests in the First Century Temple. People are entering the Temple and walking past him but he is outside.

And then he sees (see? An important word!), he becomes AWARE of Peter and John about to enter the Temple and then THEY become AWARE of him. V.4 – “Peter and John fixed their gaze on him and said ‘LOOK AT US!’ and he began to give them his attention...” (see the emphasis on awareness).

Have you ever been approached, like at a stoplight by someone asking for money and you averted your eyes? Well, they do the exact opposite on this occasion and they look intently at him (“fixed their gaze”)...and they insist, “Look at us!”

Awareness and attention and eyes are important to this description. The disciples of Jesus Christ are IN THE MOMENT and apparently on the look out for what God is doing (praying with their eyes open).

They want this man to be aware...and for the onlookers to be aware. “Look at US!”

This guy was in pretty rough shape (not sitting in an ultra-light titanium wheelchair!)...lame since birth. Over 40 years of age (says in the next chapter) and has to be carried by family/friends...to his job...begging.

In some places on earth ...even today...in fact in many places there's a different view of disabilities. Here we try to get past it...to adapt...or minimize the appearance or effects of disabilities...In many places it's just the opposite. They are accentuated and almost advertised to make it as a source of income.

Point is there's a desperation here – he's likely competing with other beggars and when a potential donor stops, he was probably very hopeful.

“Look at us!” says Peter and the man's heart jumps! He thinks he's going to get some real money.

But what does he see when he looks at them? He see's two poor fishermen from Galilee (fishermen out of water!)... They're country people. And then those VERY disappointing words, “We have no money.”

“WHAT? That’s weird...it’s cruel...”

But then the man gets something else...something he didn’t ask for ...something he never dared dream.

And now, “Look at us” takes on a new meaning – “We are the Jesus People – pay attention to what we say, “In the name of Jesus the Nazarene (don’t miss the SOURCE!) “Look at us and you’ll see immediately: We GOT NOTHIN’!...It’s all about him! In the NAME of Jesus the Nazarene – walk!”

And then this man...who had never walked...he jumps up...and goes from sitting to leaping...and praising God...walking and praising God...and enters INTO the Temple....all the people SAW him praising God! And they were taking NOTE! The outsider is now IN!

And that’s actually an important part of the story. There’s an emphasis on awareness and then a stress on motion/movement: our second point!

When Messiah comes, Isaiah 35.6 says, “Then the lame will LEAP like a deer.” The life of God, the lavish, flowing, playful, splashing, drenching life of God...will be a sign that the Kingdom of God is come. In the next chapter this healing will be called a “sign” – the only specific miracle in Acts called a sign.

The man is walking for the first time INTO the Temple...he moves...he is qualified...excluded by the Law (For what the Law could not do, weak as it was through the flesh, God did: sending His own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and as an offering for sin, He condemned sin in the flesh, -Rom 8.3) but healed and embraced and welcomed by the Name of Jesus Christ and by GRACE. He has cleared the hurdle, leaped over the requirements NOT BY EFFORT BUT BY GRACE – he has been raised by Him who was raised...and now he is INCLUDED...no longer outside but praising God on the INSIDE – moved.

The word in v.16 “the name of Jesus which has strengthened this man WHOM YOU SEE AND KNOW (there’s awareness again!)...this man has been given perfect health...” Interesting word used only HERE in the whole New Testament but used in the Greek version of the OT (LXX) for unblemished lambs used in sacrifices AND for whole, unhewn/uncut stones which could be used to build the altar – this man was now WHOLE and qualified to be a stone in the New Temple God is building! (see Deut 16.9, 27.6; Josh 8.31)

He has moved...not by his efforts...or the Apostles magic...NOT BY ANYTHING the Law/religion/Jewish leaders could do – but God has qualified him and made him a stone fit for the New Temple God is building... The Temple was a house, built by Solomon as a “place for God’s Name to dwell” but it was really only an emblem because God can’t dwell in a house made by human hands and now BY THE NAME OF Jesus Christ God is making a new Temple not made

by human hands with hewn stones and anything synthetic...this is a Temple made of living stones made whole/perfect and qualified by God's own work.

And here in Solomon's Portico (v.11) where the people are full of awareness and amazement, Peter says, "You've seen it with your own eyes – God has moved the immovable – has qualified the unqualified and brought in the outsider.

The sermon Peter preaches is like the one we read last week – it MOVES back and forth from OUR failings to God's saving. We think this was magic (12) but it was the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob (the God who appeared to Moses and used that same designation for Himself in the Burning Bush at the start of the Exodus – and now a New Exodus is begun – people liberated from their bondage to the Law and to a religious system based on works that cannot save us). Our failings and God's saving.

You delivered Jesus up and disowned Him (the City of God and the City of Man conspired against the Messiah [Psa 2.1-4]) and you asked for a murderer (see our failings!) and YOU PUT TO DEATH THE PRINCE OF LIFE (what a joke!) but God raised Him from the dead (v. 15) See, our failures are met with God's faithfulness.... He qualifies the unclean and disqualified ...our failures are reversed by God and by His Messiah! It MOVES/alternates: our sin/God's saving!

Then the sermon MOVES from all the heavy-weights of the Hebrew Bible – Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, Samuel, the Prophets – they are all pointing to THIS MOMENT and to the One who would succeed where they all failed. This is THE great Prophet who is fulfilling God's promises – a Prophet Moses saw from afar – a Prophet who not only speaks God's word but IS God's Word – the Mind of God in Flesh!

In Him – Jesus the Nazarene – all the Prophets and Promises move toward Him...and if YOU really are Sons of the Prophets and Sons of the Covenant – well YOU of all people should jump at this! LEAP like a deer...come like this powerless man, be MOVED, come walking and leaping and praising God.

God has come to BLESS you...to move you (see how that's equated in the last verse) "For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways." (26) – See, repentance isn't an ugly requirement meant to take away your fun – it's refreshing! It's a blessing that leads to new life and freedom and joy!

So, we looked at 1) Awareness 2) MOVEMENT and finally 3) Presence: how can this Good News give US a new sense of awareness and MOVE us – how can it free us from the age of distraction and put us "in the moment" ...aware of what God is doing, praying with our eyes open?

There's a phrase you may have heard "FOMO" – it stands for "fear of missing out". We are so surrounded by choices that when we arrive at a truly wonderful location or moment or

experience...we are NOT ABLE TO ENJOY IT because of... FOMO (fear of missing out)...so we have to put it up on our Social Media site...we have to let others see it and also see what THEY are doing...we can't be in the moment...

But the Gospel reminds us...makes us aware of infinitely BIGGER REALITIES...Jesus Christ is the great fulcrum of time...the focus of God's saving work...the reality to which all things point... HE IS THE AXIS MUNDI...HE IS THE TEMPLE AND THE TRUE DWELLING OF GOD....

AND He is in the process of restoring all things (as in v. 21)... and though there's a lot of different opinions among believers as to HOW that will take place (and when) we KNOW THIS...it's happening!

He has even now BEGUN His great remodeling project of the Temple made without HANDS... gathering together broken, disqualified, outsiders... making them WHOLE... like unhewn/unblemished stones...living stones in a living Temple – the dwelling of God on earth.

We look in the mirror...and we who believe in the Name of Jesus the Nazarene ... we look messed up... We have our hang-ups and rough edges...but HE HAS MOVED US...outsiders brought IN...disqualified made "in perfect health" – unblemished in His sight because Jesus Christ lived the life we failed to live, died the death we deserved to die...He sits in the presence of His Father representing us...and will indeed restore US and restore all things...

Meanwhile...I keep repenting and believing...little by little made unafraid to see my failings because I also see God's faithfulness...I'm seeing that to repent and return...is the path of refreshment and blessing.

I see that "Aslan is on the MOVE" ...and everyday...I am invited to walk with Him...walking and leaping and praising God...the hurdle has been overcome... There is no fear of missing out because I am not OUT ...I'm IN...carried through the Beautiful Gate...raised to new life...praying with my eyes open...dwelling IN the True Vine...a stone in the Temple that is the Body of the Prince of LIFE...

Come...if you are outside...come IN through the Beautiful Gate...believe in Jesus the Nazarene...repentance is a blessing... come into the Temple... be raised to new life...believe.