

April 19, 2009
Easter 2

"Boldly Sharing the Blessings of Jesus' Resurrection"

ACTS 3:12-20

When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵ You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶ By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see. ¹⁷ "Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸ But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰ and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you-- even Jesus.

We love stories of people being rescued when they are lost. This past week a two year old boy named Nathaniel became lost in the woods in Onalaska, Washington. His dad had fallen asleep on the couch while his mom was at work. He went out the back door and wandered off into the woods. The dad awoke, frantically looked for his son and then called 911. For hours search and rescue teams combed the nearby area with its dense forest, cold streams and steep cliffs. They finally located the boy with infrared sensors with his four month old puppy cuddled next to him to protect him and keep him warm.

The book of Acts, the Acts of the Apostles, is about the disciples of Jesus seeking and finding people who were lost, not in a woods, but lost in sin and condemned to eternal death and punishment. Today we see Peter boldly sharing the blessings of Jesus' resurrection. That amazes us, truly amazes us. On another occasion when he had an opportunity to confess his faith in Jesus, he became a coward and cursed and swore that he never knew Jesus. Here he is willing to risk his life so other people can have the same blessings of believing in Jesus' and his resurrection.

How bold are we in sharing Jesus' resurrection with those who are lost? How many times have we preferred to remain silent and not ruffle any feathers when it comes to talking about what we believe? The night of his resurrection Jesus told his disciples, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." The Savior who made Peter bold is the same Savior who sends us out into the world and calls us to be his witnesses. Look at what Jesus did for Peter and then believe that he will do the same for us.

Pointing to the need

Peter has just healed a lame man in the name of Jesus in the temple during the hour of

afternoon prayer. The man had been lame from birth. He never walked. He made his living by begging at one of the entrances to the temple. The people are so astonished at seeing the man jumping up and done in joy, they gather around him and Peter wanting to know more about what had happened. Peter tells them, "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our Fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus."

Then Peter points out their sin and need to be rescued with these startling words, "You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murder be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead." If you want to engage an audience and connect with people in a crowd, you are wise if you first get to know them and make them feel comfortable with them. Tell a joke, or a story, something about yourself that they can relate to. Peter does none of this. He launches right into telling them how they had killed Jesus, disowned him, and even preferred to release a murder and crucify Jesus. Peter wants these people to see how lost they are, so they will come to believe in what Jesus has done to rescue them.

When little Nathaniel wandered off into the woods, the search and rescue people did not sit around and have a cup of coffee and donuts, or wait until the next day, to get more organized. They went into action immediately because they knew how urgent it was to rescue the little fellow before he stumbled over a cliff, fell into a stream, was attacked by coyotes or wild dogs or even died of hypothermia. Peter wanted the people to realize they would have to answer to God in the final judgment for the way they treated Jesus. He wanted them to know they needed Jesus to rescue them, just as the dying thief turned to Jesus for help when he was on the cross.

Jesus could allow us to perform miracles of healing in this church, or give this gift to one of you, so that large crowds of people would gather around you and you could tell them about Jesus. Instead the Lord Jesus allows us to live our lives for him in ordinary ways, as the salt of the earth and the light of the world. He allows us to be what Peter called a kingdom of priests and holy nation that we might show forth the praises of him who called us out of darkness into his marvelous light. As you live your life for Jesus, people will become curious and want to know more about what you believe. At what point do you show tough love and boldly share with them how lost they are as Peter did to the crowd gathered around him in the temple?

What approach do I should I use? Should I be blunt? Should I be gentle? Should I paint with a broad brush (such as this) by telling someone the simple truth, "All have sinned and fallen short of God's glory" or "All we like sheep have gone astray, we have all gone our own way." Or should I use a fine brush (such as this) to speak of some detail in our lives that condemns us before God. Look at the details of the way we fail to show kindness and love to others at home, or the way we fail to show respect for people at work. And then there the shameful thoughts we have, thoughts that God always sees in minute detail. Or maybe I need to talk about death coming to all people, and standing before God in the final judgment. Peter did not wait until the next day to point out the need these people had for Jesus to forgive them and give them peace with God.

Jesus, sitting at the right hand of the Father, will listen to our cries for help as we ask him to help us show people their need for salvation as Peter did. Jesus will also hear our prayers as we ask him to help us share the hope we have in his resurrection.

Pointing to the hope

Peter boldly points to the hope that we have in Jesus and his resurrection by first making it clear how this man was healed. He says, "God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given complete healing, as you can all see." Notice how Peter directs all attention away from himself and points to Jesus as the reason this man was healed. How different this is from some of the faith healers you see on television, or Christians today who love to talk about what is going on in their lives so they can draw lots attention to themselves and make other Christians feeling like second class believers.

It certainly was a powerful healing that took place in Jesus' name. Peter says, "This man whom you know and see was made strong." Ever seen the legs of someone who has not walked for years? See how thin the legs are. There is no muscle. Ever see a baby learn to walk? Imagine the months it would take before a grown man learns to walk. This man leaps up. His legs have muscles on them. He knows how to balance and even jump around. They say about some basketball players who can jump high, "He's got the hops!" This man had the "hops," because he was miraculously healed in Jesus' name.

For the people listening to Peter who were lost eternally because of sin, there was hope in the miracle of Jesus' resurrection, hope that their sin was completely paid for and forgiven. Peter tells them, "Now brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through the prophets, saying that Christ would suffer." As great as the miracle of healing was, an even greater miracle took place when Jesus arose from the dead. These people were ignorant of this miracle. They were ignorant of why Jesus had to die for them. All of this was plainly set forth in the Old Testament. In our Sunday morning Bible study we are going through a course called, "Connecting Sinai to Calvary." It is amazing how the Old Testament pictured through ceremonies and foretold through prophets how Jesus would suffer, die and rise from the dead. The night of his resurrection Jesus showed his disciples the nail prints in his hands. The book of Luke also tells us he showed them from the Old Testament how all these things had to happen. Can't you hear some of the people who saw the lame man healed even asking Peter for more information about the Old Testament that pointed to Jesus?

Peter shares the hope of cleansing from sin that could only be found in Jesus. "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you, even Jesus." Peter says, "Repent." That means change your minds, change your minds about how you think you can wipe your own slate clean before God. Trust in Jesus to do this for you.

I am holding in my hand an old slate or chalk board. If you mark on it, you can erase it, but it will still have some of the chalk left on the board. There are only two religions in the

world. All the world's religions say that you have the power to wipe your slate clean by how you live. Only the Christian faith says that Jesus, God's Son, crucified on the cross, and raised to life again wipes the slate clean for you. Colossians 2 uses this same word for wiping out sin with the words, "He forgave us all our sins having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us, that stood opposed to us." The night of his resurrection Jesus showed his disciples his hands and said, "Peace be to you!" The nail marks are the supreme evidence payment has been made for our sin, and our slate has been wiped clean." Oh, how we love to hear Peter say to us this morning, "That he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you- even Jesus." Jesus was appointed for you, just for you. What peace this personal appointment brings to us.

We love stories of people being rescued. How happy the parents of little Nathaniel were when they found the boy safe in the woods with the puppy nestled at his side. This may be the week the Lord allows you to boldly share Jesus' resurrection with someone he brings across the path of your life. The night of his resurrection Jesus said, "As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you." With the prophet Isaiah we say, "Here I am Lord, send me, send me." Amen.