

*Sermon for 2 Easter, Year B  
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Our reading from Acts opens in the middle of a story. There is a reason everyone is running together to where Peter and John are. The reason is that they have just healed in Jesus' name the lame man at the Beautiful Gate of the temple. This man who for years had sat at the gate of the temple and begged, this man who had never walked in his life, has just walked into the temple with Peter and John. And he hasn't simply walked. The passage says that he entered with them, "walking and leaping and praising God." The picture in my head of this scene is of the lame man jumping up and down in circles around the two apostles.

He causes such a ruckus that everyone comes to see what's going on. And what they see is this man whom they knew as a lame beggar jumping up and down, shouting praises to God and clinging to Peter and John. They could never have planned for an audience like this, even if they had a committee work night and day for a month. It is the power and the providence of God that give increase in ministry. The only input we have is the choice to be faithful when God is on the move.

And Peter makes that choice. He takes the opportunity God gives him to talk about the good news of Jesus the Messiah. In fact, the first thing he says is cut out of our reading, probably just to shorten it. But he says, "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk?" You see, to Peter and John, the person actually doing something in this whole scene is Jesus. They are simply along for the ride, offering the redemption of Jesus to everyone they meet.

That's what the church is all about: the redemption of the world by Jesus Christ. That's where we start and that's where we end. There is nothing else. And anything that doesn't fit into that is out for us.

Of course, that all presupposes the *need* for redemption. In other words, it assumes the problem of wickedness. And any message that ignores that reality is not a Christian message. Peter hits it right away. "But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer ... and killed the Author of life". We don't candy-coat the gospel. Without the bad news of sin, no one can receive the good news of salvation. And the blessing of salvation is what we want for all people.

It turns out that the fact of our wickedness does not separate us from the love of God. Even when we reject Christ, he loves us and carries out his plan of redemption. "But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his

Christ should suffer, he thus fulfilled.” So our guilt is no excuse for continuing to reject Jesus. He offers us the gift of salvation, the gift of a restored relationship with the creator of the universe. And the only question is whether we will accept it or not.

The message of St. Peter is very simple. It is the message to which we must respond, and it is the message that we must convey to others. “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord”. We must turn away from our wickedness and turn toward God. It’s that simple. And for simple obedience to that message, there is an amazingly grand blessing. Our sins will be blotted out, and we will be refreshed in the presence of the Lord. We haven’t earned it, and we certainly don’t deserve it. But that is the blessing that God wants to give us, if only we will turn to him as obedient children.

That’s the message we have to share with other people, after we have responded to it ourselves. We are the inheritors of God’s promise to Abraham, “And in your posterity shall all the families of the earth be blessed.” The church was almost doubled on the day that Peter gave this message. I don’t know exactly what God will do when we begin to follow his example, but I can promise that we will be a blessing, and that our legacy will be a blessing. And times of refreshing will come from the presence of the Lord, like the lame man leaping about the apostles, shouting praises to God.