

May 19, 2019 A Touch of Amazement Acts 3:1-10

You have heard me say it before, I am saying it again. The Book of the Bible we call “The Acts of the Apostles,” is Luke’s letter to Theophilus to share with that man what happened next. Jesus had a public ministry that lasted approximately 3 years. He was arrested by the Temple authorities, and taken to Pilate, the Roman Procurator of Judea. Pilate sentenced Jesus to death by crucifixion and provided a Roman military detail to do the job and to do it right. On that Friday afternoon Jesus died. Before dark, (the start of the Jewish Sabbath) Jesus body was given a decent Jewish burial. Joseph of Arimathea, and Nicodemus saw to that. They were two Jewish Pharisees who followed Jesus discretely. Privately. Joseph of Arimathea provided the tomb. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day Jesus rose from the dead. He was seen by women and the disciples dismissed their testimony. On that Sunday evening, Jesus followers gathered in the upper room, the same room in which they had celebrated the Passover and received the sacrament of Communion. Jesus presented HIMSELF to them. Thomas was not present. The following Sunday evening they gathered again and Jesus presented HIMSELF to Thomas.

The resurrection of Jesus became public knowledge. It was undeniable. The Jewish Rabbinical Council, the Sanhedrin put out the story that the disciples stole the body. In spite of bribes, paid to the military detail guarding the tomb, that story wilted away like false news. Jesus is risen becomes

the testimony of the followers of Jesus. The witnesses were so numerous and respected, the Sanhedrin never issued a statement denying the resurrection occurred following that first abortive attempt. Luke wrote The Acts of the Apostles to tell the story, to tell the history because it is a long story, filled with details, the names of people who came to faith and the names of the places where things occurred.

But! Huge but! It is a story and a history of miracles. Amazing stories! Luke testifies that the testimony of the apostles, the remainder of the original 12, is that every amazing detail was not the work of them as men, but the continuation of the ministry of the living Christ, by means of the power and joy of God's own Holy Spirit. The key insight which the Book of Acts offers us, and we forget it at our peril, is that the church grows, and people come to faith, and they act in faith in Jesus, because they see something as old as the Old Testament: that God is at work in the midst of those who believe in Him. The amazing fact disclosed in the Acts of the Apostles is that Jesus is alive. That HE is the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. That God's Holy Spirit is the power for effective ministry in the midst of the believing community. Which really brings us to Acts chapter 3.

In the New Testament era, and the Roman world of that time there were no social programs for the poor. If you were ill, you were disposable. You were expected to die, and as Scrooge would say in Victorian fiction, and reduce the surplus

population. If you were an unwanted child...a deformed child, or a girl, or the number where the family could not support one more mouth to feed...you were disposable. You were expected to be abandoned where nature would take its course and death would deal with the problem. If you were a widow, you could not hold property and you were not your husband's heir. If your family was not willing or able to support you, you were excess baggage. You were on your own. Age, infirmity, the inability to generate a living were expected to take their course. You would die. The crippled man in Acts chapter 3 had been crippled from birth. He could not walk, and he could not work. He did have people who helped him, who carried him to the temple, where he begged for money from those who were going to the temple to worship. And we are tempted to say he got lucky.

Peter and John (the two disciples who went to the open and empty tomb on the morning of the resurrection...who saw with their own eyes that the tomb was empty, and who came to believe that Jesus was risen through the Sunday evening events) James and John were going to the Temple to pray. It is the middle of the afternoon, 3:00 o'clock. This is really interesting. Nowhere else in the whole of the New Testament do we read of disciples of Jesus going to the Temple to participate in what we would call worship activities. It is another sign of the effect the resurrection of Jesus has had on them. Their new found faith has taken root. In fact they have become seriously concerned about God centered living. They

are not going to the Temple to offer a sacrifice, or hear a sermon, they are going there to pray.

Their route into the Temple takes them by way of the gate that is called Beautiful. It so happens that gate is the station where the crippled man is taken and left to beg for money. And that is what he is doing. He sees Peter and John coming along and entering and he asks for money. "Hey mister, do you have any spare change?" Even in Jesus time the way most people, the majority by far, would deal with such an appeal is to keep walking and look straight ahead, as though they did not hear the cry for help, as though the crippled man was invisible, as though he were a dead man. This is the moment when things really get interesting.

Peter looks straight at the crippled man. And it is not just Peter. John does the same thing. And as a matter of fact Luke tells us Peter said, "Look at us!" John and Peter are looking at this crippled man eyeball to eyeball. The crippled man is looking into their eyes. He expects he is going to receive money....a gift, a donation. And Peter says, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Peter extends his right hand. The crippled man takes it. Peter helps him to stand, literally pulling him to his feet. The man can feel something different. His feet and ankles support him. He starts walking. And then he starts jumping. And then he joins Peter and John as they walk into the Temple courts. Every now and then he jumps into the air.

He has never been able to do this before. Ever. And he is shouting, "Praise God. Praise God!" And there is no question. The man's walking, and jumping and praising God, causes heads to turn. He is instantly a commotion. Add to that some people not only look at him, they recognize him, "Look it's the cripple who was begging at the gate! What the heavens?" And there is a whole lot of wonder, and a touch of amazement...and even some seeds of faith.

A crowd gathers at Solomon's Colonnade, and Peter realizes this is an opportunity and once again he addresses a crowd concerning the power in the name of Jesus who is risen from the dead. There is power in the name of the Lord! There were consequences. Peter and John wound up spending the night in jail. Remember when there was a time when Peter sought to fly under the radar of the authorities lest there be consequences? And people did come to faith in Jesus too.

Here is the point. When God introduces a touch of amazement into our lives, we should share that. Something will come of it. There will be those who will say we are nuts. Someone may even get angry. But a touch of amazement bears other fruit too. Joyous faith as you well know is infectious. Sometimes it is exactly what someone else is looking for. Waiting for. Hungering for. It was the very thing God blessed in the early church. We would be wise and faithful, if we took note of that and even shared our wealth as John and Peter did.

“Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.... All they had to give was a touch of amazement. It changed everything...for the crippled man, for Peter and John, for the world. The world needs us to share our touch of amazement.

Let us pray;

From the Book of Praise, selection 35, these words.

Lord, All that I have promised, help me to fulfil, And in all who love you, work your perfect will. May your truth and mercy keep me all my days, Let my words and actions be my songs of praise. Amen