

# Twenty-first Sunday after Trinity

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[ 0 : 00 ] Let us pray, and then we'll get into Acts chapter 3 this morning. Father in heaven, we thank you that your word truly is like a double-edged sword.

That it cuts past our excuses and our insecurities and our pride and our ego and gets to the very place where we are exposed.

So, Lord God, your word can do what only your word can do, is draw us to Christ, the great healer. Lord, this morning as we open up Acts 3, and we encounter a man that has been lame from birth and how he was healed, Lord, help us to see that the same Jesus that has healed this man is here amongst us this morning by his Spirit.

And that healing and restoration that he offered that man is offered to us. We pray this in Christ's name. Amen. I have a wonderful friend in my hometown who often says, and I kid you not, I'm living the dream. He loves saying this, I'm living the dream.

My friend's not a churchgoer, although he was raised in the faith. However, he still desires and seeks what we would call a blessing, or to be blessed.

[ 1 : 26 ] And not just to have a few nice toys or some memorable experiences. Rather, he desires a blessing that seems to be heavenly. What I mean by that is a comfort and a joy that transcends work, want, struggle, and pain.

I thought about him this week while I listened to a conversation between a historian and a philosopher. The historian is Tom Holland. The philosopher is Douglas Murray, both Englishmen. Both of them wouldn't claim to be confessional Christians, although they are favorable to the faith. And within this conversation, they had a discussion about how Christianity has shaped the West in no small way.

And even though Christianity, by and large, is not practiced in the West anymore, the West is still, in a sense, reverberating with the effects of Christianity over the centuries.

People still think in religious categories, even if they have almost certainly abandoned the Christian rhetoric or specific Christian practices. Even still, they went on to describe these two conversationalists, Tom Holland and Douglas Murray, how the lack of transcendence with the Christian God, in a sense, still haunts the Western imagination.

[ 2 : 54 ] God is gone, but in a sense they were saying, we still long after him. We still desire him. We still want to enjoy real and forever blessings.

Although, as a society, we do not know what those blessings ultimately are or where to find them. But we still crave after something that only God can give.

So as we make our way through Acts 3 today, the text will help us to see that our deep desire to be blessed is a God-given one. And that our greatest vision of blessing is so unbelievably small compared to what God has in store for us if we are called by his name according to his purpose. So we'll break up the text into three bits. We'll look first at... We're breaking it up to look at specific characters in the plot.

So the first, we'll look at the beggar's healing, verses 1 to 10. And the second, we'll look at the nation's guilt, verses 11 to 18. And we'll finish it off with looking at the servant's mercy, 19 to 28.

[ 4 : 08 ] So let's read verses 1 through 5. Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple, that is called the Beautiful Gate, to ask alms of those entering the temple.

Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, look at us. And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.

Let's pause there. As Peter and John walked through the beautiful gate to get into the temple to worship the Lord, a beggar called out to them for alms, as he would have called out for anybody. Scholars believe that this gate that he was sitting at would have been absolutely huge, 70 plus feet high, ornate, made with Corinthian brass.

I don't know what Corinthian brass is. I'm not sure. It sounds wonderful. But it was made with ornate Corinthian brass. So to see this destitute man propped up against this absolutely stunning gate would have been a contrast, quite the contrast to see.

[ 5 : 25 ] It would be like, I guess in a sense we're a bit desensitized to it, unfortunately, but it would be like seeing somebody panhandle amongst the skyscrapers on Bay Street, or downtown Ottawa with the gorgeous Parliament building in the background.

It seems like these two shouldn't be there. With such beauty, there shouldn't be somebody begging. It's such an intense contrast. It was similar with this man.

He was a fixture at the gate, being brought daily by others. Even more, given that the first century was a much more communal culture than ours today, people would have known him.

They would have seen him. They would have likely known his parents, or at least the men that brought him to beg. They would have known that he was lame since birth.

And we're not sure why he was lame, but that he was clearly so lame, so crippled, that he couldn't walk on his own. This man was known.

[ 6 : 32 ] This was not a charade, but he was a known beggar at a very busy intersection in Jerusalem. And what happens? Looking for a few coins, what does he receive instead?

Let's continue on in verse 6. But Peter said, I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk.

And he took him by the hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk and enter the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

By verse 9, Luke records four times that this man was walking. Make no mistake about it, Luke says. The lame beggar who everybody knew, who was crippled from birth, who had to be carried to his spot by men, because he was too crippled to walk.

[ 7 : 44 ] This man has been healed. And he is walking. This is no charade. It is no hoax. God has done something.

In fact, later on in verse 16, Peter says that this man was given by Jesus perfect health. The condition of the beggar, remember, isn't just that his legs don't work, or that he doesn't have the ability to make money.

It goes even more than that. This man is socially estranged from his people. He's also religiously estranged. Notice that he was daily at the gate.

He was not daily at the temple. He did not participate in the religious life of the people of God. And his greatest victory, day by day, was being carried home with a few extra coins in his pocket.

Maybe a few bites of bread in his stomach. In some ways, friends, we are not dissimilar. We struggle with our relationships.

[ 8 : 49 ] We struggle with the guilt that we have as we interact with God, thinking that one mistake is all it takes for God to turn from us. That we are so far gone because we fall into the same habitual sin, and we are not liberated from our sin, but we feel the weight of guilt and shame heavier and heavier day by day.

Our situation, at best, a victory for us is to create wealth, to purchase toys, seek experiences, all of which in and of themselves are not bad things, but that can often be, if it is our greatest victory, a very pitiable thing.

We know we need a blessing, or a cure of some sort, so we look inward to ourselves, or we look outward to people and things, all of which lack the capacity to do anything more than to numb, or to distract.

I guess the similarity between us and the crippled man is that we look for silver and gold, but the thing is, what we really look for is a divine touch from God.

We look for silver and gold, however only a divine blessing will do. In the West, have we not abandoned God for silver and gold, whatever that silver and gold may be.

[ 10 : 29 ] I say in the West, I speak generally, but I hope the West isn't just outside of these walls for us, that Canada isn't just outside of the walls for us, but inside the walls too.

We swim in these waters, we breathe this air, where we constantly fall into the temptation to find our wealth not in God, find our blessing not in God, but in silver and gold.

But we desperately crave Him. Blaise Pascal, he writes this, and if you've ever heard the term, a God-shaped hole, this is where it comes from. This is what he says, quote, What else does this craving, and this helplessness proclaim, but that there was once in man a true happiness, of which all that now remains is the empty print and trace.

This he tries in vain to fill with everything around him, seeking in things that are not there the help he cannot find in those that are. Though none can help, since this infinite abyss can be filled only with an infinite and immutable object.

In other words, by God Himself. We have a longing for divine blessing, whether we call it that or not, that can only be filled with the divine.

[ 11 : 56 ] something, someone, that will, that is eternal, that is immutable, that is unchanging.

The emptiness that we feel, the restlessness that we may not be able to explain, friends, is because we are created to know God and be known by Him. If your conception of the Christian life is that of drab and boring, lacking of real blessing and joy, I'll humbly suggest to you and to myself in times of doubt and struggle, that we have a misguided view of Christ.

He is a healer and a friend. And He says to you, stand up and walk. I will heal your, your, the knees that buckle and the ankles that, that have no strength in them.

I will, I will give you strength in your hips and your muscles and you will walk. He bids us to stand up and walk. Walk in true life. Walk in full forgiveness.

Walk in the victory of His cross over death. Walk by His strength. He says to a woman in John's Gospel, listen, that water, if you drink from it, you'll get thirsty later on.

[ 13 : 22 ] But if you drink from living water, you will never thirst again. This is a wonderful image of the satisfaction, the deep, deep satisfaction that we long for, being satisfied in Christ.

And friends, He offers it to us lame beggars today. to us who have no chance of filling that God-shaped hole in our souls. Christ Jesus did more than simply heal this man.

Look with me at verse 8. And leaping up, he stood and began to walk. And he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.

This man seems to be restored. He began to enjoy social restoration and real joy. And notice that no longer is he at the gate of the temple, but he is entering in the temple itself.

He is worshipping the Lord because of what the Lord had done for him. Because Jesus had given him perfect health. This joy became the source of public curiosity and amazement as well.

[ 14 : 27 ] Verses 9 and 10. And all the people saw him walking and praising God and recognized him as the one who sat at the beautiful gate of the temple asking for alms and were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

And similar to what had happened at Pentecost in Acts chapter 2, if you remember two weeks ago, Peter seeing this opportunity to give glory to Christ and to bear witness to the cross, he stands up and he begins to preach to the crowd that has gathered.

And much like the lame beggar, we may find ourselves actually identifying with this next group. And this is our second group of people we'll look at. The guilty nation. Look with me at verse 11 to 16.

Actually, 11 to 13. While he clung to Peter and John, that is the healed man, no longer lame, no longer a beggar, while he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's.

And when Peter saw, sorry, and when Peter saw it, he addressed the people, 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 have made him walk?

[ 15 : 43 ] The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant, Jesus. And I'll pause there.

Peter directs their attention away from themselves. He addresses them and he says, Men of Israel, don't you know that you cannot, that we cannot do such things?

But only God can do it and not just any God but the God of our forefathers? Peter roots this healing in the scriptures by referencing Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the patriarchs of the faith.

So, Peter in a sense is saying this isn't a new religion but one that is the culmination of all that God has promised according to his word. Then he gives it straight to the nation, the nation of Israel, those that are gathered as he did at the Pentecost sermon.

And look with me, verses 13 and following to verse 16. I'll read at the beginning of 13 again. The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant, Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate when he had decided to release him.

[17:00] But you denied the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be granted to you. And you killed the author of life whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses and by his name, by faith in his name, has made this man strong whom you see and know.

And the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. Peter says, Listen, you killed Jesus.

You dishonored him in four ways. You handed him over to be killed. You disowned him before Pilate. You traded Christ for Barabbas, a murderer, an insurrectionist.

You killed the author of life. Friends, what a damning accusation. It was this Jesus that they sent to the cross that was the one who healed the man from his condition.

And Peter punctuates this by using the term to describe Jesus the author of life. How can you kill the author of life except that that's what has happened. The author of life.

[18:10] The creator of all things. The one who spoke the world into existence. The one who orchestrated salvation itself by dying on the cross, being buried and rising again to new life.

You killed this man. It was faith in that Jesus that caused that lame beggar to be healed. It was not as if Peter and James had the power or knew the right formula that would get the desired response. There was enough people that could do incantations in the ancient world or at least claim to. But it wasn't that. It was by faith and Peter is making it very clear. And even this faith that made this man well was the result of Jesus' power for that proclamation of the power that Peter and John gave to that lame man gave that beggar an opportunity to believe.

So even the act of faith goes to Christ himself. Even still, that healing, even though it's talked about with faith and that Jesus did it, the healing, even the healing itself fades into the background.

And the apostles and the man. Instead, Jesus and him alone comes to the foreground. The spotlight is on Christ here. He is the holy and righteous one, it says.

[19:28] He is the glorified one. He is the author of life. The one who was raised from the dead. And the Jewish people whom he came to save betrayed him and killed him and handed him over, traded him for a murderer and ultimately he died.

As I mentioned a couple weeks ago in Acts chapter 2 in Peter's Pentecost sermon, the killing of Christ was indeed by the nation of Israel.

They are guilty for it. But make no mistake, it was the sin of all mankind that Jesus went to the cross for. For all mankind. It was the sin of me.

Sin of the Gribas and Susan and Brian and Samuel and the Petrancos and Steve. For all of us he went to the cross for. This wasn't a, this wasn't just an issue with the Jewish people that they messed things up.

But they messed it up because they're human and guess what? We are too. Christ died on the cross and we are the guilty ones. So, in a sense, we betrayed Christ in the same manner.

[20:44] I mean, we didn't hand him over to be killed. We didn't disown him before Pilate. We didn't trade him for a murderer. But our sins surely killed the author of life.

Friends, consider how we search for life and yet we disregard the author of life. how we try to absolve ourselves from guilt and shame and ignore the Holy and Righteous One who is without shame.

Who offers us in a sense the alleviation of all our sin and shame. We try to glorify ourselves something that only God can do. We fight death tooth and nail but only through Christ can we have hope for eternal life.

Friends, we are in a very real way confused people. And that's why we confess today that we have sinned by the things we ought to have done and the things we ought not to have done.

And there's no health in us. And it seems jarring every time we read it. I don't know if it's at least when I read it. I don't know about you. But in morning prayer it says it calls us miserable offenders. [ 21 : 55 ] It's such a striking like absolutely no sugar coating on it thing to call somebody. You are a miserable offender. But is that not what we are if we are honest with ourselves?

If we see ourselves in a sense in the boots of the nation of Israel here? verse 17 Peter says this And now brothers I know that you acted in ignorance as also and as did also your rulers. Yet even still even though it was ignorant we didn't know that we were sinning against God we were just you know neck deep in opposition to the author of life.

Peter understands that this was an ignorant thing. Nevertheless it was still the will of God the Father to send Christ to the cross. Verse 18 this is what it says But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets that his Christ would suffer he thus fulfilled.

It was certainly our sin that put Christ on the cross but it was God's will for him to die in our place. We talked about it a few weeks back about the kind of a hard concept to grasp maybe potentially fully ungraspable.

[ 23 : 17 ] I mean we could get bits of it how our agency our human agency interacts with God's sovereignty. But this is what the text is saying in verse 17 and 18. God had foretold this by all of his prophets and then later on in the chapter he will name three of them Moses Abraham and Samuel.

all prophesying Jesus' death and resurrection as the Christ. Which brings us to our third and final point for if this was God's will to send Christ to the cross it was because he was making a way to extend his mercy through his son.

And in here he calls Jesus the servant and it's an allusion to Isaiah 52 and 53 but really all of the servant songs in Isaiah's prophecy from I believe chapter 41 all the way culminating in 53.

There's four different servant songs and this is what Peter is alluding to. So look with me at verses 19 and this is our third and final point how we see the servant's mercy being extended to us.

Repent therefore and turn back that your sins may be blotted out that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send the Christ appointed for you Jesus whom heaven must receive until the time of restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

[ 24 : 49 ] Repentance. That's the response is repentance. Now that the truth has been explained now that the surgeon's scalpel has cut right to the disease and we know what it is right to that horrible tumor we know what it is we can't deny it anymore ignorance is dispelled will you change?

Will you repent? Will you be honest with yourself before God? Will you turn away from the wickedness and turn towards Christ? That's what he's asking the people that's what he's asking us this morning will you turn away from the wickedness and turn towards Christ?

In case you think this is too hard or too limiting once again I humbly suggest to myself as well that we may have failed to recognize our great need for Christ and Christ's great mercy extended to us. Look again and see the result of the mercy we see here in verse 19 that your sins may be blotted out verse 20 that times of refreshing may come and finally that he may that's the Father God send the Christ appointed for you Jesus whom heaven must receive until the time of restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago that our sins are blotted out that we have times of refreshing in his presence and that one day Christ will return to right all wrongs.

That is the promise for us if we repent and look to him. So let's briefly look at these three things.

The first that sins will be blotted out literally our sins will be obliterated crushed pulverized made into nothing dust blown lost in the wind gone forever.

[ 26 : 39 ] It's not like a it's not a half measure that he'll blot out our sins they're blotted out completely. It is a beautiful picture that that we see here our ledgers are cleaned out we are in the black forever.

All our shame all our guilt gone you are free. Is this not what we desire deep down? To know that our shame although that how great it was is completely crushed and remembered no more.

It's good news. A freed soul is a happy one a joyful one. And this then opens up the opportunity for us to come before God's presence which is the second benefit of repentance and throwing ourself at the mercy of Christ.

This refreshment that is offered to us and is this not in a sense what our souls long for? Is this not in what a sense my friend from back home wants?

Times of refreshing where our hard back-breaking labor of life not physical necessarily but just the grind is over and that our sorrows cease.

[ 28 : 01 ] to be in the presence of Christ himself to have the Holy Spirit reside in our souls to provide comfort and to lead and to guide in times of need this refreshment has in view a picture of God's leading confused and in a sense lost people.

we will have purpose in the presence of God we will have significance in the presence of God not because of our own good deeds that we that are that are that we've done this week or this year or even this morning that although are here are gone tomorrow are forgotten but based on Christ righteousness his perfect work on the cross that lasts forever that's a refreshing thing leaning on somebody who is steadfast to the end and finally the great and sure hope that Christ will return and judge the living and the dead in some ways it can be a scary thing but friends the past three weeks have been very tough come Lord Jesus to right all the wrongs and to stop all the wars and to take the evil and expunge it eliminate it forever and ever

Christ has fully defeated death and sin on the cross but with his second coming all remnants of death and despair will be forever vanquished it's as if on the cross when Christ rose again it's like he paraded death through the streets as a conquered king king and in a sense death was mocked it was as if in the ancient Roman world the captured king would be brought through the city and people would hurl insults at him and throw garbage at him and he would be mocked forever and in a sense that's what Christ did on the cross however the kingdom of death and Satan and sin continues on there's a remnant that continues on until Christ comes again and when he comes again it will be forever crushed and we will enjoy his presence for all eternity chapter 3 ends with this verse 26

God having raised up his servant sent him to you first to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness God the father has done an incredible act of kindness to us by sending God the son to take on flesh to die in our place to defeat evil and rise again to new life will you turn from your wickedness will you turn from your wayward ways will you see Christ as completely glorious and so very worthy of your entire devotion will you see him as the source of ultimate blessing if we're honest with ourselves anything else is folly in the weight of glory C.S.

Lewis penned these well-known words and this is what he says quote it would seem that our Lord finds our desires not too strong but too weak we are half-hearted creatures fooling around with drink and sex and ambition when infinite joy is offered us like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea we are far too easily pleased friends the vision that God has for us to bless us is far greater than we could ever hope by our own for a hundred lifetimes and he offers it to us this morning let us see Christ as a source of ultimate joy and blessing for he offers it to us this morning let us pray heavenly father help us to be real about the type of people we are that lord even the very best of us when it comes to eternity and to ridding ourselves of sin and shame and guilt we are as good as a lame beggar but you are in the business of healing lame beggars so lord we ask that you would heal us this morning that you would bring to us the realization that our sins are great but that you are greater and that we would repent by your help by your spirit that we would humble ourselves not so that we would be laid so low never to get up again but so we can know true and eternal blessing and joy for forever starting right now lord help us to be people that glory in the cross we pray this in christ's name amen