

Refreshing News

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Preacher: Canon David Short

[0 : 00] Let's bow our heads and pray as we stand. Our Father, we pray that you would pour into our hearts your Holy Spirit, that our eyes may see, that we may leap with joy, that you would create a fresh spring in the wilderness.

We pray even that the living Lord Jesus would reveal himself to us, that we might know him and know the peace that he brings us. For we ask in his name. Amen.

We're going to have a look this morning at that second reading, Acts 3, mostly in the last part of it, just above the creed that we just said.

I've only once in my life ever seen joyful leaping and jumping in church. I was asked by friends in my mid-twenties to go and preach at a local Pentecostal church.

I'd never been into a Pentecostal church before. And during the first song, a group of my mates who I knew from university went out into the aisles and started leaping and dancing.

[1 : 15] I knew them. They'd seemed pretty normal to me up to that point. Their leaping and dancing was, and this will date me, it was in the style of the midnight oil lead singer, Peter Garrett.

That dates you too, if you get that. And every time the music would strike up, they would get out and they would dance and they would leap around. I'm yet to see that in an Anglican setting.

It's funny, isn't it, how different contexts make us less self-conscious. I don't think I've ever been to a hockey game, an ice hockey game, without watching people leap and jump and high-five.

But that just doesn't happen at a cricket match. It's a different thing altogether. Last year I had the privilege of visiting the cathedral in Dar es Salaam in Tanzania.

And when the choir sang the anthem, they just started moving slightly, a little bit left, a little bit right, and then their whole bodies would move. And then I realised the whole congregation around me was moving like this.

[2 : 22] And I don't know if you picked up this morning, but our choir moves as well. But it doesn't move left to right, it moves forward and backwards. So, you just watch for that.

I think most of us are pretty self-conscious of this, but there's no regular place in the liturgy for leaping. Now, the reason I'm telling you this is that this story from Acts 3 takes place after someone has been leaping and jumping in church.

And it begins in verse 11. We find, we come in halfway through the story, there is a beggar who is clinging to the apostles, John and Peter, who has created a stir in the temple courts.

This is a man who was crippled from birth. And each day he'd be carried to the gate of the temple where he would beg for money. He was the very picture of misery.

And one day, about seven to eight weeks after Jesus had been raised from the dead, he was sitting at the gate and he got much more than he bargained for. Peter and John came along and Peter said to him, I don't have any silver and I don't have any gold, but what I do have I give to you.

[3 : 39] In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk. And he did. And he then began to leap and to spring and to praise God and to yell right there in the temple courts as you would.

And now he clings to Peter and John and I think he's clinging to them because if he doesn't hold on to them, he's going to go off springing somewhere else. And the crowd rushes in. They've heard the noise.

They know who this is. I mean, some of the people have even thrown some change to him in his little tin. And now he's leaping and whooping. And so Peter, as the crowd gathers, Peter begins to preach to them and he wants to explain to them what is going on.

And he says to them that this lovely and stunning miracle not only is a result of the resurrection, but it shows us something of the reality and the nature of the resurrection.

He says, look, it wasn't because Peter and because John and I are particularly pious or powerful. This man was healed by the name of Jesus Christ. Who was killed a couple of weeks ago, but who is very much alive and active right now.

[4 : 52] In fact, this healing, he says, gives a picture of what the resurrection does. Now, this is very important for us this morning because the resurrection is not a one-off event way back there in history, a kind of a curious oddity, a freak.

Nor is the resurrection a happy ending, a lucky occurrence for Jesus. It is the beginning of something that opens the door that concerns every single one of us.

And if you take the Bible and read it from beginning to end, which I wish you would, you will find that God promises from the first pages of the Bible that he is going to bring a time when he will restore and renew and bring complete health and healing, both spiritually and physically, personally and cosmically, to the whole world and to all those who follow Jesus Christ.

And this miracle is a preview of that healing. And so I want to give you two words. Peter uses two words in this sermon that describe the effects of the miracle or describe the effects of the resurrection for us.

One is in the future and one is now in the present. Let's look at the future first. And the word is restoration. Look down at verse 21, please. He's raised from the dead.

[6 : 19] In verse 21, he's in heaven. He must remain in heaven, Jesus. Verse 21, until the time comes for God to, here it is, restore everything as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

The restoration of this man to health points to the time when God will restore everything. That's why it was a very Jesus-like miracle. This guy was lame from birth.

His feet, his ankles, his calf muscles, his thigh muscles had never, ever been used. Beyond human capacity to fix. It needs God, the creator.

And the miracle, the name of Jesus, the name of the risen Jesus, brings complete, instantaneous, permanent healing as a demonstration that the resurrection has started something.

And you know that the person who wrote this was a medical doctor, Dr. Luke. And he uses no fewer than five medical terms to describe this complete healing. The guy gets up.

[7 : 24] He doesn't stumble around. He doesn't need six months of physiotherapy. He leaps and runs and praises God, which is exactly what the prophet Isaiah said about the great day of restoration.

Then will the eyes of the blind be opened, the ears of the deaf unstopped. Then will the lame leap like a deer. The mute tongue shout for joy. Waters will gush forth in the wilderness and streams in the desert.

The healing of this guy is a sign from God that he has already begun the restoration in the resurrection. The fixing of the ankles and the feet is a preview of the renewing of the whole creation when even our bodies will be saved by the work of the resurrection.

And some of you may feel that talk like this is just a little bit naive, that you've given up hope that God is going to do anything really significant in your life. And so you've taken things into your own hand.

It's up to us after all. Leave me alone. Isn't it safer to remain lame at the gate and just accept my limitations rather than raising my hope and having them dashed?

[8 : 37] This is why we have to see, you see, that the resurrection comes from outside our world. It is God breaking in with the great restoration. It comes from outside of us, from God.

Because every utopian dream that this world has ever had comes from inside the world and is created by human beings and we all share this deep corruption in ourselves and therefore every utopian dream will always end up in despair.

It takes what is eternal and what is incorruptible to break the chains of what is corruptible. And the healing of this guy is not an isolated incident. It's a sample of God's plan to renew and to restore through the resurrection from the dead.

Again, the word restoration is a medical word Dr. Luke uses and it describes the full health, the full healing. Because in the healing of this man we get a small picture of the day when God will come and he will restore justice and he will restore truth and harmony and beauty and goodness to his creation.

You know the Bible teaches that the world we live in is sick. We are sick. Physicists call it entropy. You know, you buy a house and in a couple of weeks you've got to make repairs on it.

[10:02] You plant a garden and a couple of weeks later you've got to pull weeds. You live until you're 50 things start to fall apart. Not for me of course, but for Dan.

He's not 50. Do you know, the world is not the way God made it. We know this. We sense this deep and profound disappointment in ourselves and in our families.

The disharmony that we have in our world that we create. The futility and the senselessness and the Bible is very realistic about this futility and this vanity and this disharmony.

It says there is a virus of decay and futility that all of us share together that is at root a spiritual issue and it comes from and is caused by our rejection of God.

We have a dislocation. We have a rupture in our relationship with God because of our rebellion against him. But the Bible, the lovely story of the Bible and I do wish you'd take it and read it, goes and it shows Jesus is going to establish and God is going to establish all the purposes of blessing.

[11:18] Complete spiritual and physical renewal at the end of the day. A time is coming when God will remove all evil, all disobedience. He will reverse the ravages of our rebellion against him.

He will take away all frustration and all injustice. He has promised a creation that is going to be marked by glory and not by corruption. By righteousness, not by rebellion.

By peace, not by futility. And how do we know that God is going to do this? We've seen it in the resurrection where God breaks the chains of death and begins something entirely new which is why this restoration can only come through Jesus Christ.

It's very interesting how Peter turns and he points at the crowd and he involves them personally and you can be thankful that your preachers are not quite this direct. Look at what Peter says in verse 13 to 15.

The God of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, the God of our fathers has glorified his servant Jesus. Now this is the crowd who a couple of weeks before cried out for his crucifixion.

[12:29] You handed him over to be killed. You disowned him before Pilate though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the holy and righteous one and asked for a murderer to be released for you.

You killed the author of life but God raised him from the dead and we are witnesses of this. This is fantastic. He says you didn't just deny Jesus.

You traded his life for a murderer's life and more than that you killed the author of life which on a scale of 1 to 10 for oxymorons is 100.

The author of life can't be killed but in some fashion the Lord Jesus Christ who is the source of life and the cause of life and the resurrection and the life submitted himself to death.

But in raising Jesus from the dead God has overcome death and he signals the final restoration which he is going to bring at the end of time. That's the first word.

[13:33] That's the first significance of the resurrection to us. Not just about Jesus. It's about the fact that he has begun the full restoration of all things that will come in the future. Well then what does the resurrection mean to us now?

And here Peter gives us a second word and it is the word refreshing. Down in verse 19 if you just look down at it. Repent then, Peter says, and turn back to God so that your sins may be wiped out that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.

Literally may come from the face of the Lord from the presence of the Lord. One of the reasons the resurrection makes Christians so happy is not just because it's pie in the sky when you die by and by.

If the resurrection was just future it would be enough, wouldn't it? It would be enough because it would ravish our future hopes. But it is more.

If we repent and turn to God, Peter says, if we believe in our hearts that God has raised him from the dead, God gives us the new life, the resurrection life, now.

[14:46] That we are brought into his presence now. And that we receive times of refreshing from his presence now. And you won't be surprised to know that this word is also a medical word from Dr. Luke.

The refreshing word. It was used for blowing cool air on a wound. The healing cool air on a wound which would bring complete healing.

And the word then came to mean not just physical refreshment and relief but spiritual and emotional and psychological. It came to stand for those who had lost hope and had lost strength and needed a fresh relief.

People who had come to the end of themselves and needed rest. This is what they needed. And what Peter is saying is that in the resurrection this wind of refreshment blows to us from the presence of God himself.

So the huge cosmic restoration at the end of time which has begun with the resurrection of Jesus blows back into our lives now with the healing wind with the life-giving and healthful wind the cool refreshing wind it blows into our lives as we turn to him.

[16:11] I lived in Sydney, Australia for a bit more than 20 years and those of you who've lived there know that Sydney is hot. Has three temperatures hot, very hot and I want to leave.

It's often over 30 degrees for a long time with plus 100% humidity. I know that sounds marvellous when it's cold and been raining for six weeks but I need to tell you it's miserable to live in that heat. You know you put your clothes on and they stick to your skin. You walk outside and heat shimmers off the pavement and people become nasty which explains a lot.

It's oppressive the humidity. But Sydney also has something called southerlies. These are huge gusting winds that come off the ocean they come up the coast and they blow into Sydney.

They usually bring rain with them and they lower the temperature by 10, 15 degrees and they lower the humidity by 20%. They wash everything clean and they make Australians bearable again. But before the southerly comes in the breeze picks up and you can smell something in the air and you can feel the air starting to move around you and the southerly may not come for a day or two but it announces itself ahead by bringing something of the cool refreshment that it's going to bring finally.

[17:40] So you see the life that God gives us now is the first breeze of the restoration that he is going to bring then. If you have new desires in your heart to love your neighbour to trust in Jesus to want to serve him above everything else that is a little intimation it's a breeze from the restoration in your heart.

Or take Jesus' words when he says come to me all who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. That is a rest that is going to be ours forever but he blows it into our hearts now a rest and a refreshment from him.

Or take the assurance that nothing can separate us from the love of Jesus Christ. Nothing. No suffering no despair no disappointment no pain that he will bring all who belong to him to his goodness and to his glory.

That is a wind from the future blowing in our hearts now. My father when he was a young man like many in Australia left Australia to serve in the second world war.

He was engaged to my mum at the time and he was away for three and a half years. And my mum tells the story of how of the day she was in Sydney when peace was declared in the Pacific.

[19:02] She was working in Martin Place which is in the centre of downtown Sydney and it has a huge open square in the heart of the city. She says as soon as people heard that peace had been signed they dropped everything they were doing they raced out into the square and they began hugging perfect strangers she emphasises that a number of times when she tells the story they cried and they held each other and they began singing to each other and she said nobody went back to work that day tens of thousands of people just converged on the centre of the city to celebrate to sing for joy.

She said when she could finally make her way to the train to travel home that afternoon actually I think it was in the evening the whole carriage which was crowded would burst into spontaneous song.

Here's the strange thing though the peace that was signed was signed thousands of miles away on a ship the USS Missouri and it's amazing that that thing that happened so far away should have such a dramatic effect on the lives of so many in Australia and the peace that had been signed had not yet affected anyone in Australia really it took months for some of those soldiers to come home but now they knew that they would come home so it is for us on this Easter Sunday peace has been made through the death of Jesus on the cross and the guarantee of the full peace and the full restoration has happened through the resurrection of Jesus Christ but we wait brothers and sisters we wait for the full enjoyment of that restoration of relationships of everything but the fact that we know that is coming the fact that we look back to the resurrection changes everything for us now and the primary wind of refreshment that blows into our hearts in verse 19 is that our sins can be wiped out repent Peter says turn again to God that your sins may be wiped out we've all turned aside from God we've all gone our own way we've all rejected

Jesus in a way and we need his forgiveness and many of us know that bone weariness that boredom and distractedness and disappointment with ourselves and we've tried all sorts of things well the death and resurrection of Jesus that we celebrate today is sufficient to wipe away our sins to take them as though they're written on a board and just wash them clean and they're gone there's no more record of them and this is where our restoration and where our refreshing come together because the forgiveness of our sins is the final declaration on the last day that Jesus will make about us but we know about it now and that is the future blowing into our hearts that is the assurance that Jesus gives us and if you don't have that assurance ask Jesus for it today and so we rejoice you don't need to leap up and jump you don't need to do that I hope your heart does a little bit of jumping in the resurrection of Jesus Christ God has begun the full restoration of the world bringing us into his glory and goodness and times of refreshing come from his presence through repentance and faith and the forgiveness of our sins and therefore we say with great confidence this morning I am sure that neither death nor life nor angels nor principalities nor things present nor things to come nor height nor depth nor powers nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in the risen Christ Jesus our Lord Amen so I am sure I am sure you may know you