

Acts 3 – The Beggar at the Beautiful Gate

We are just a few moments away from Pentecost – in our present lives, but also in the story form Acts 3. A few moments away from the spirit-filled, inspired and enthusiastic friends of Jesus, who discover which power they now have...

Peter and John are not just filled with the holy spirit. They are just beginning to find out what wonderful things they can do – in the name of Jesus...

The man in our story was lame from birth.

Never in his life had he taken one step alone.

Because of this he must have been very sad. He may have dreamed that he could run and jump, that he could move freely, that he could take the steps he wanted to take, go where he wanted to go, and not constantly be organised by others.

He may have dreamed of being able to do things by himself and not to be so terribly dependant on others.

How often may he have tried to dream himself away... imagining he would climb mountains, run long distances, work hard and live his own life?

But then he'd always wake up from the dream and realise that he was still sitting at the temple gate.

Never had he come any further.

Never had he been inside.

He lived from the regular visits faithful Jews paid the temple.

Many of them went three times a day.

Peter & John are among them.

After the horrible times of fear after Jesus' death, they are now experiencing that the holy spirit can transform their lives and empower them to do things they would have never thought they could.

Peter and John walk towards the beautiful gate, pass this crippled man that sits there every single day and see his outstretched hand with which he begs for alms day in day out.

Some people don't even look at him but walk past as fast as they can.

Some search through their pockets looking for the odd coin they can give him, and then carry on...

On feast days, because spirits are high, some of them may give a little more...

How surprised must the beggar have been, when no coin was thrown in his hat, but a strong deep voice of a grown-up man urged him to lift up his eyes and look at him.

“Look at us”, Peter told the man.
“I have no silver or gold - “

Had Peter & John disappeared after this sentence, nobody would have been offended or surprised.
The difference only comes in what Peter says then: “...but what I have, I give you.”

That is the highpoint of our story.
In fact, the climax is maybe even the moment of silence...
that short but so important pause that changes a whole life...

I have no silver or gold,
but what I have,
I give you...

And then comes the crucial point:
in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

What Peter does, he does in the name of Jesus.
He was just beginning to realise that what Jesus had done before,
they now could do themselves:
preaching with conviction,
enabling people to live new lives,
healing men and women...

The highpoint in our story is that the person who follows Jesus does not give as everybody expects but discovers that beyond the general expectations, there is something so totally different to give, something much more valuable... that there is life to give – in the name of Jesus: new life, support, love & care.

While everybody else pushes past the crippled man, Peter stops in front of him, looks at him and challenges him. “Look at us!”

Then he takes him by the hand and lifts him up.

Just imagine Peter: fully concentrating on what he is doing – in Jesus name.

Giving this man a hand,

touching him,

feeling him,

getting so close that the man's feet and ankles which he'd never used in his whole life, were made strong, so that he could stand.

Peter's undivided attention sets in motion what is then described at almost breathless speed.

Immediately, the Bible says,

the man jumps up,

stands and walks,

enters the temple and praises God.

There is no hesitation in the man's reaction...

no time to wonder much, to worry or even mistrust.

The man takes what Peter offers – and is healed.

Peter's simple but through and through honest "Here I am for you". sets the lame man on his feet and heals every aspect of his pitiful life.

Let's be honest, the trust and confidence and the spontaneity of the man, is just as much a miracle as is the healing.

There is no second in which he has doubts or shows fear.

He jumps up – and praises God.

And I wonder how I would react?

Would I mistrust the healing?

Would I dare to stand on my feet?

Would I hide my new condition – rather wait a bit, to see if it is really true?

Would I be ashamed?

Try not to draw people's attention towards me?

Would I rather behave as the crowd did in the story?

Stand back at a distance and be filled with wonder and amazement?

Why did these people not jump and leap and dance and praise with the healed man? Celebrate his new beginning?
The new chance in his life?
Rejoice with him?

Why not let the healing of an individual become the shared joy within the community?

Where would we stand in the crowd?
Close to the man, in some distance, or even among those who will completely reject the healing some verses later in the book of Acts?
If we were in Peter's shoes, what would it be that we would have to give?

And is it worth considering that Peter could so freely give, because John was there at his side reassuring and supporting him?

If we identify much more with the lame, when would there be the moments in our lives where we'd need healing and renewal?

On the background of our Biblical healing story, in which not Jesus heals, but those who follow him, I wish for us:
outstretched hands to help us, complete commitment, undivided attention and people to help us find our own way and give us courage.

And I wish for us that we will have the courage ourselves to be Peters and Johns, to reach out our hands to others in the name of Jesus and raise them up again.

I wish for us that we give what we can give and fill the world with wonder and amazement.
Amen.