

We Must Give People the Chance for a New Life

Series: Acts of a Healthy Growing Church

Acts 3:1-10

January 29, 2017

I want to invite you to turn to page 6 in your bulletin. We have a page for taking notes.

A few weeks ago, we began our series “Acts of a Healthy Growing Church.” We are looking back at the Early Church through the book of Acts and see how they were healthy and growing. For they went from 120 weak followers to 3,000 strong, changing peoples’ lives for Christ.

Thus far, we’ve learned:

1. We must minister in the Holy Spirit’s power.
2. We must maintain a warm fellowship.
3. We must multiply small groups.

Today, our 4th Act of a Healthy Growing Church is this: We must give people the chance for a new life.

Today’s passage is a familiar one if you were a youngster in church. There was even a song we would sing. The story comes from Acts 3:1-10:

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer – at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, “Look at us!” So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.¹

The Beautiful Gate was a large gate covered with Corinthian brass that led into the Temple area. It was one of the favored gates which many people preferred to enter.

The Jews observed three times of prayer: morning (9:00 am), afternoon (3:00 pm), and evening (sunset). At these times, devout Jews and Gentiles who believed in God often would go to the Temple to pray.² Peter and John, along with hundreds of other worshippers, were going to the Temple for the afternoon prayer service.

Beggars would place themselves at this gate. Why? It was a perfect spot. Not like some spots we see people at alongside an intersection or light. These beggars would station themselves in front of the place of worship. And when a worshipper would see them, that worshipper felt a tug in their heart. They knew that giving alms as it was called was a pretty good way to go into worship. You’re getting ready to go pray to God;

¹ Acts 3:1-10 (NIV)

² Life Application Study Bible

it helps to have given something to help the poor before you go in, right? The beggars knew that, so there were many there that day.

One in particular was there that day. Look at verse 2:

*Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts.*³

This man had some people who would take him to the temple gate when they went to pray. I assume they would pick him up, because he had been lame since birth, carry him to the gate, drop him off, and then, when they were finished, they would take him back home after they were finished or leave him until after the evening prayer time to get him. And this happened every day.

Now, let's pause for a minute. The lame man was at the Beautiful Gate every day. He had to have been there sometime in the last 3 years. Jesus healed people at the temple... but not this man. Why?

Here is something we all need to hear. There are 3 answers to our prayers. When we pray, God answers with either "Yes," "No," or "Not yet." "Yes," "No," or "Not yet."

Likewise when we pray for healing, God answers in 3 similar ways: "Now," "Later in your life", "When you get to heaven." "Now," "Later in your life", "When you get to heaven."

God does not always come with what we want when we want it, but He always comes on time with what we need. Let me repeat that: God does not always come with what we want when we want it, but He always comes on time with what we need.

The lame man missed being healed by Jesus. He may have thought that his chance was gone forever. Not so, he would soon find out.

It seems to me that we can discover 5 things we must do to give people the chance for a new life, like Peter and John did for this lame man.

First, we must see the need. Verses 2-3:

*When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John.*⁴

Anyone here like going to the pet store or to the animal shelter to look at the puppies or kittens or cats or dogs that need a forever home? Some people do; I can't. I can't go into those places. Anyone like me? Why? Because we would take them home. So we avoid those places so we won't feel guilty. We close our eyes because we don't to see the need.

The church can't afford to do that. We must follow Jesus' example:

- Matthew 9:36: When [Jesus] saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.⁵
- Matthew 14:14: When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick.⁶
- Mark 8:1-2: During those days another large crowd gathered. Since they had nothing to eat, Jesus called his disciples to him and said, "I have compassion for these

³ Acts 3:2 (NIV)

⁴ Acts 3:3-4 (NIV)

⁵ Matthew 9:36 (NIV)

⁶ Matthew 14:14 (NIV)

people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat.⁷ And He feeds 4,000.

And there are other passages. Peter and John knew their Lord's compassion, so they didn't close their eyes; they saw the need.

A healthy growing church sees the needs around them. They don't close their eyes to it. They see the need.

Second, we must stop to address the need. Verse 3-5:

*When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.*⁸

Peter and John saw the need, but they also stopped to address the need. And to do so, they had to get the lame man's attention.

STARING AT PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT, WHO HAVE SOME PROBLEM.

The lame man had always been stared at, so his gaze was down. He spoke his appeal: "alms for a lame man, alms for a lame man," but he didn't look at people. He didn't see people's faces. His perspective was always at their legs, at their feet.

So Peter has to get his attention. "Look at us!" So the man did. The text says "he gave them his attention." The Greek word here means to look intently.

Paul uses this same word in his admonition to Timothy:

*Keep a close watch on how you live and on your teaching...*⁹

The lame man held his eyes right on Peter and John with great eagerness "expecting to receive something." He took Peter's invitation as a promise of a large gift.¹⁰

Do you see what's going on here? Peter looks straight at the man. John looks straight at the man. Then the man looks straight at Peter.

Scientists say that when a human and a dog look at each other in the eyes, both of their brains release happy chemicals into the brain, and the bond between the two grows stronger.

It is the same with people. Look into your spouse's or your kids' eyes. If they are here, do it know. When we look into each other's eyes, we come together. We bond more closely.

We need to stop to address the need, and the first step is to look into the eyes of the needy. Not looking down on them, as hundreds and hundreds had done to the lame man sitting there. But stop and look them in the eye. Then you can address the need.

Third, a healthy growing church must offer real help. Verse 6

*Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."*¹¹

People will often present their symptoms, we've got to dig deeper to meet their true need. This lame man had sat at this gate every day for 40 years. What need did he request be met? Alms. This wouldn't fix anything; he'd have to return the next day. It's like putting a Band-Aid on a gaping wound.

⁷ Mark 8:1-2 (NIV)

⁸ Acts 3:3-5 (NIV)

⁹ 1 Timothy 4:16 (NLT)

¹⁰ Word Pictures in the New Testament

¹¹ Acts 3:6 (NIV)

What did Peter do for him instead? He gave him ability to stand up and walk. Usually when we resolve to find the true need, we're choosing to invest some time in a person, it rarely is a quick fix and may even be inconvenient for us.

Our church is part of the food ministry at St. Paul. What need is being presented? Hunger. What need is actually bringing them there? It may be the need for a job, maybe a medical condition has brought on hardship, it may be something else that has brought them to seek help in providing for their table.

How do we as a church meet persons' real needs and point them to Jesus? It begins with a conversation. Asking the questions to better know them and their needs, then committing to partner with them to get back on their feet.

Mark 2 tells the story of Jesus teaching in a house, and the people crowded in to see and hear Him. Four men brought a friend, a paralyzed man, to be healed by Jesus, but they couldn't get inside. So they climbed on the roof, started digging a way to make a hole, then lowered their friend to Jesus. What do you think was the most important need for this man? To be healed? That would seem obvious. But Jesus knew that his most immediate need was forgiveness. "When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralytic, 'Son, your sins are forgiven.'"¹² He of course healed the man, but He dealt with his most pressing need first.

Sometimes, we can be oblivious to needy people whose most important need is to receive forgiveness and a relationship with Jesus. In some churches, if the crowd is too thick and too disinterested, a needy person will simply wander away. How sad when the people in a church are so preoccupied with their own relationships and agendas that they don't even see those who are trying to get in. That should never happen. Where Jesus is present, may the faces of the faithful reflect His love, may their hands extend to greet all newcomers and seekers as friends, and may they open a way for others to come in.¹³

A healthy growing church must offer real help.

Fourth, if we are to be a healthy growing church, we must know where the power comes from.

A do-it-yourselfer who went into a hardware store early one morning and asked for a saw. The salesman took a chain saw from the shelf and commented that it was their "newest model, with the latest in technology, guaranteed to cut ten cords of firewood a day." The customer thought that sounded pretty good, so he bought it on the spot.

The next day the customer returned, looking somewhat exhausted. "Something must be wrong with this saw," he moaned. "I worked as hard as I could and only managed to cut three cords of wood. I used to do four with my old-fashioned saw."

Looking confused, the salesman said, "Here, let me try it out back on some wood we keep there." They went to the woodpile, the salesman pulled the cord, and as the motor went "vvvroommmm." The customer leaped back and exclaimed, "What's that noise??"

There's power when you pull the cord.

Look at verse 6 again.

¹² Mark 2:5 (NIV)

¹³ Life Application Study Bible

Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."¹⁴

Peter knew where the power was coming from: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. He said it again in Acts 9:

[Peter] found a man named Aeneas, a paralytic who had been bedridden for eight years. "Aeneas," Peter said to him, "Jesus Christ heals you. Get up and take care of your mat." Immediately Aeneas got up. All those who lived in [there] saw him and turned to the Lord.¹⁵

Peter knew where the power was coming from: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

- When we place people on our prayer list and pray for healing, we should do so in the name of Jesus Christ.
- When we put together and host Vacation Bible School, we should do so in the name of Jesus Christ.
- When we put together a team to go on a mission, we should do so in the name of Jesus Christ.
- When we pray for release for those addicted to drugs, we should do so in the name of Jesus Christ.
- When we want to invite our friends to church, to a relationship with Jesus, we should do so in the name of Jesus Christ.

When we do things without the name of Jesus Christ, then prayers are not answered, VBS falters, the mission trip fails, addiction continues, and friends are lost. When we should do things in the name of Jesus Christ, there is a chance for new life.

Finally, if we are to be a healthy growing church, we must join in the change.

What do I mean by that? Look at what Peter does in verse 7-8:

Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.¹⁶

Peter took an active role in this lame man's new life. He took him by the hand, helped him up, and went to worship with him. He helped him do 3 things he had never done before.

Of course, walk. The man could now walk and leap.

Second, he could go into the Temple for the first time. People with infirmities were not allowed inside the temple. So for the first time, he could see the glory of the Temple and the glory of God.

And third, for the first time, he could be a witness. The people saw him walking, leaping, and praising God, and they were filled with wonder and amazement. His life before was one that people looked down upon; now he is leading them in praise of God. He is a witness of the power of Jesus Christ in him. And that was because Peter joined in his change.

¹⁴ Acts 3:6 (NIV)

¹⁵ Acts 9:33-35 (NIV)

¹⁶ Acts 3:7-8 (NIV)

We never know what will happen when we join in the change, when we give people the chance for a new life. But every saint of the Lord, every pillar of the faith, every witness of God's new creation, had someone join in their change:

- Peter had Jesus, who grabbed his hand and pulled out of the waves and who brought him back to the work of the Lord.
- The lame man had Peter, who pulled him up out of a life of demeaning begging to walk and leap and praise God.
- John Wesley had a young Moravian missionary by the name of Peter Boehler who helped him understand the grace and love of God.
- Mother Teresa left home at age 18 to join the Sisters of Loreto at Loreto Abbey in Ireland, who helped her understand her call to missionary ministry.
- Billy Graham was converted in 1934, at age 16 during a series of revival meetings led by Mordecai Ham.
- I was led to Christ by a woman during a Lay Witness mission, then disciplined by my parents.

We never know what will happen when we join in the change, when we give people the chance for a new life. But we know that when we do it in the name of Jesus Christ, we will give people the chance for a new life.

My friends, some of us here may find ourselves just as stuck as the crippled man. Stuck in a pattern because we've known nothing else. Maybe you haven't chosen Jesus as Lord and Savior, maybe you came to Christ but haven't been living like He's your Lord and Savior. Today is your chance to rise up and walk in the name of Jesus.

"We often ask God to solve a small problem, but He wants to give us a whole new life and help for all our problems. He may say, "I've got something even better for you." You may ask God for what you want, but don't be surprised when He gives you what you really need."¹⁷

¹⁷ Life Application Study Bible, Acts 3:5-6