

Worship the Lord 24/5/15 – “A lame man healed” – Acts 3

Good morning everyone! Please join me in prayer, as we begin our worship of the Lord and our reflection on God’s holy word: Everlasting God, we bow our hearts before You now, acknowledging You as the Creator of all there is, a universe that surpasses even the capacity for our imaginations to conceive. We are thankful that amongst all of this You created us, *in Your Image*, blessed with that ability to experience the joy of *love*; grateful that, because of Your great love for us, You not only provide us with all we *need* but You do so in countless ways that shower us with the beauty and wonder of Your creation, experienced in mind, body, heart and soul. And thankful that You were never content to be a distant Creator but You always walked and talked with Your people; and that as we strayed further and further from Your righteous paths, in time You revealed Yourself to us as Jesus, the Redeeming Christ, and as the Holy Spirit to continue to guide and accompany those who accept that proffered Salvation. Thank You, Mighty God, our Heavenly Father, and help us to draw closer to You each day, holding secure to our redeemed relationship with You, *following* You and *servicing* faithfully as Your disciples, whatever the circumstances. So speak to us now, opening our minds and hearts to respond to the truth of Your holy Word. In Jesus’ name we pray. Amen

“*Let them eat cake.*” The hapless queen Marie Antoinette has been stuck with that infamous caricature of the callous indifference of the ruling classes of France to the plight of the majority of its population in the 1700s. The picture painted by this dark humour was that the pampered queen could not conceive of someone having, literally, *no food, nothing*. So, on being told that the people were rioting “because they have no bread”, the simple solution as she saw it was, “Then let them eat cake”! Despite the phenomenal change since that time, those of us who have something, not just food, can still be oblivious of those without. Of course, callous indifference was one of the major sins that tore at the heart strings of God throughout the times of the Old Testament, as God worked to shape the Israelites into an example for the ruthless world of that day, of how people had been created to live in communion with God and each other in a world made with abundance. It was not any different at the time Jesus and His Apostles walked this Earth. Our Scripture today will be focused around one of those Apostles. And it seems to me that, in a different context, “*Let them eat cake*” might well be adopted by the Church to convey the *radical generosity* of our God. For both the ‘pampered’ and ‘the pauper’ can each be oblivious to what they personally do not have, and to the possibilities and potential they are missing. Let us therefore hear and heed the Word of God from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 3: **READ**

The title provided for this morning’s reflection is, “A Lame Man Healed”. However, this piece of Scripture is *much bigger* than *that*! Undoubtedly, a man crippled from birth *was healed*; Dr. Luke records that his ankles miraculously became strong and he was able for the first time to jump to his feet, stand and walk. God still cures like that sometimes. Just this past weekend you may have seen the news of an American girl who is this month graduating from high school, after being declared *brain dead* in 2011 from an accident. Her chiropractor felt pushed to *pray* for her one more time and as the doctors removed her from life support she started breathing on her own.

However, I had the privilege a while back to attend an international conference of churches, on persons with disabilities. There were many people there in wheelchairs (as well as others who were blind, hearing impaired, and so forth). Did *they* feel *abandoned* by God because they were unable to leap to their feet and jump and walk? *Certainly not!* To the contrary, they were *filled with praise for God* because they experienced God doing other marvellous things for and through them, helping them enjoy very *fulsome* lives each day in other ways. In fact, one of the major challenges those from certain countries faced was Christians praying, for example, for those in wheelchairs to get up and walk, and berating them for lack of faith when that miracle did not happen. So these faithful Christians at the conference were helping the rest of us to see better how we could help in God's quest to ensure people with disabilities experience God's type of justice, meaning that things are put *right* to enable them to also have fullness of life. So we must not make the mistake of seeing our text this morning as only about a lame man being healed, as *great* a miracle as that alone is.

For arrayed throughout this Scripture are all the parts of what God explicitly requires of us, *justice, mercy, and humility* in the face of God, including those aspects so strongly reinforced by Christ: the importance of the *one*, the individual, and *the personal responsibility* of each follower to go and spread the good news in various ways to all others, helping them to become new disciples of Christ.

Following the Gift of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the Believers were faithfully meeting together in one accord, devoting themselves to the preaching of the Apostles, to caring fellowship, communion, prayer and praising God. "And the Lord *added to their number daily*, those who were being saved." (2:47) In other words, the Church was growing fast. But obviously there were many around who had not converted, including many important people, some of whom we meet later if we continue reading today's story. And there was also this *one man*, a crippled beggar, who also was not part of this wonderful fellowship of the Christian believers. But God had plans for him. Were there any other crippled beggars in that growing Church? Perhaps God had decided it was time for another step in the shaping of the church, a reinforcement of Christ's emphasis on the importance of the individual. The church was growing fast. Wonderful. But there were *individuals* who were not being *seen*, had not been touched by it. I always wonder about the fact that Acts 2:46 tells us that "*every day*" the new church met "together in the *temple courts*" and 3: 2 tells us that "*every day*" the lame man was brought there too, to beg from the people going into the *temple*. Had he not been seen by them before? Anyhow, today Peter *saw* him. When we spend time in the Church, *truly* learning from the Scriptures and the Apostles' Teachings, praying and listening to God, we begin to "*see*" people, people that we perhaps tried not to notice before, or see them in a new light, a fellow human made by God, *in God's image*, despite the weakness that makes him different. Peter *saw* him that day, took time for him, and so facilitated God's justice to "roll on", giving him the opportunity to be brought into the fold where he could share in the fullness that God does not want anyone to be denied because of tears in the fabric of our societies. The *Church*, because of Christ's love, *must see* these opportunities for *more* to be done than put them *outside the gates* to beg, *must see* that *they too* must have the 'cake' we look forward to having.

Of course, the worst way to be 'left out' has nothing to do with whether a person is materially pampered or poor, whether challenged by physical, emotional, educational or mental disabilities or fully robust in all these areas. As Jesus made clear, the worry is not about the building caving in and killing you, it is if we remain smothered by the rubble of unrepentant sin. As Christians, that, therefore, is the main 'cake' we have to help people of all kinds to avail themselves of, the structural protection of the Cross; and unfortunately their cry for that help is not overt and obvious to us as that of the crippled beggar to Peter and John. And that presents us with a much more complex responsibility of how we will say 'look at us' and see what you are missing, what you really need and what God is holding out right now to you to take from His outstretched hand.

However, do so we must; for the other individual whose importance cannot be overlooked in this, is *the individual Christian* who did what God wanted him to do. The Church is still dependent on that. We have to do *all* that God requires the Church to do; just *some* of it is *not* good enough, no matter how much of a good time we are having in fellowship and enjoying the preaching of the Apostles. It's been like that from when God first started making a people unto Him. God's precepts were great, providing wonderful protection for the weaker members of society, and so on. But if there had not been the obedient Boazes to make sure the Ruths were really allowed to gather the grain at the edges of the fields, not only would the widows and orphans not have enjoyed the provision God had made for them but they would have been abused as well. So if Peter and John had both continued on to prayer, feeling that the *other* ought to be the one stopping to deal with the beggar, then it would have been just like today when you and I sit back waiting on someone else in our wonderful Church to do those other things that Jesus commanded His followers to do.

Then there is the third requirement, to walk *humbly* with our God. Without that, we cannot properly see the need for the justice and mercy. 'It is not any power of mine or John's that has healed this man', Peter stressed, 'but the *power of God, through faith in Jesus the Christ.*'

That is the same power, the only power, that today can put right all the lameness in our society, whether it is crime and violence, parental neglect, child abuse, employee exploitation, whatever - all sin. Analyse them against God's precepts and see. But as it has always been, it is not good enough to *know* that God's precepts will work. *Each* follower of Christ must let God use us to put these in *action*, not wait for 'John' to do so instead. And do so as Peter did, relying on, highlighting and glorifying the name of *Christ*. *Then* people will praise God and be saved, swelling the ranks of disciples. Will *you* do so? Amen.