

“A Healing Community”

Acts 3:1-21

November 1, 2015

INTRODUCTION:

We're looking today at our second core value, a healing community. We believe that God calls us to be a place where lives are healed and restored. We all need healing because all of us have been wounded. There is no child who hasn't been wounded somewhat by a parent. There is no parent who hasn't wounded a child. And all of us have suffered self-inflicted wounds by our own sin. These wounds are almost never intentional. It is the rare parent who sets out to wound their child. But the wounds come anyway, because our selfish sin brings harm, both to ourselves and those around us. And then there are also the wounds that come from living in a fallen, broken world. It is a world with such evil things as cancer and Alzheimer's.

The miraculous healing of this lame man is a taste of the healing Jesus brings. It is a powerful miracle on multiple fronts. He has been lame from birth. Walking requires both strength and skill. When children begin to gain the strength to walk, they still must learn the skill of walking. In one moment, Jesus gave both the strength and skill, not only to walk but also to jump. With this comes great joy to his heart. It is all a fulfillment of what the prophet Isaiah had said would happen when God shows up to save his people. **“Then shall the lame man leap like a deer”** (35:6). Now God has indeed shown up in the person of Jesus, and these promises of renewal and restoration are beginning to be seen. Let's notice what this passage teaches us about healing under the following three divisions.

I. The Church's Role in Healing

It was customary for Jews to pray three times a day, the second of which was at the evening sacrifice at about 3:00 p.m. Since the Jews marked time from sunrise, the ninth hour is 3:00 p.m. Peter and John are on their way to the temple for prayer at this hour when they encounter this beggar who had been lame from birth. He had been positioned at one of the gates leading to the temple in order to take advantage of the mindset of those entering the temple for worship. Almsgiving was viewed in Judaism as a meritorious act, and giving a little money to a beggar would commonly be viewed as gaining merit for the giver. When the lame man asked Peter and John for a gift, we're told that Peter and John both directed their gaze at him and asked him to look at them. They told him that they didn't have any money, which tells us something about the financial sacrifice these early leaders were willing to make to follow Christ. But they did have something else that they would give to him. Peter commanded

him to rise up and walk, took him by the hand and helped him to his feet. Immediately, his legs were strengthened and he began walking and leaping.

We learn several things from this about the church's role in bringing healing. As a church, we have the privilege of being used of God to bring healing to those wounded. The power for healing belongs to Jesus alone. But just as Jesus used Peter's hand to raise up this lame man, so he gives us the honor of being used to begin to bring healing to our broken world. The first thing I notice is the remark about Peter directing his gaze at this man. Peter saw him. People like this are easy to look past. We learn from verse 10 that he was customarily placed here to beg, and such people typically just become part of the background. They are noticed, but not really seen. What did Peter see? It is clear that he didn't see merely a lame man, but a wounded man Jesus wanted to heal. He saw the man not for who he was currently, but for who he could become by the grace and power of Jesus.

This gives us an important application as we become a healing community. We need to see people not for what they are through the brokenness of sin, but for what they can become through the power of Jesus. This is sometimes referred to as believing in people, but I don't like that language. We're not called to believe in people, but in the power of Jesus. Part of our role as a healing community is to see people for what they can become through Jesus and then speak that to them and pray for them toward that end. It is a mindset of faith that is the opposite of being critical. The critical spirit sees what is wrong with people, and the gospel mindset sees what God could make of someone. Have you ever seen a man crippled in life because his father thought the best way to motivate him was to shame him by telling him everything wrong with him? Peter didn't dwell on this man's infirmity but on the powerful **"name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth"** (v. 6). I remember a basketball coach I had who took the time to see me and affirm me. I would have done anything for him. I remember a pastor once who saw something wrong in me and tried to help through criticism. It was deflating, not because he was completely off base with the criticism, but because he hadn't taken the time to see me with the eyes of Jesus and correct me with words of hope and affirmation.

There is a second role the church has that we see in Peter. I notice that Peter quickly takes people to Jesus. When everyone in the temple sees the familiar figure of this lame man engaged in the unfamiliar activity for him of walking and leaping, they are understandably surprised. Luke says it more strongly, reporting that they were **"utterly astounded"** (v. 11). Peter quickly seizes upon that as an open door and says that they shouldn't be surprised because this is what should be expected when God shows up. This was done, he says, not by any special power or piety possessed by him or by John, but by the power of Jesus. Jesus is the one, he goes on to say, that you killed. He then calls them to enter into the healing Jesus brings through repentance and faith.

Here's what we learn from this. As we undertake to be a healing community, we need to remember that we can heal no one. Jesus alone brings healing, and it is our job to point people to Jesus. It is tempting to try to fix people ourselves. Our normal way of doing that is through advice-giving. But advice-giving, even if it is good advice, is powerless in itself to help people in most situations for the simple reason that the problem is usually deeper than not knowing what to do. What is often needed are such things as hope, motivation and power. Jesus gives these to us through coming to him in faith. That brings us to our next point as we consider what Jesus promises to do for us.

II. Jesus' Provision of Healing

We tend to think of healing only in physical terms, applying to the healing of the body. We should think of healing in a fuller sense, a healing we sing about in our beloved Christmas hymn, *Joy to the World*. "He comes to make his blessings flow far as the curse is found." The curse is found in physical illness, but that is not the only manifestation of sin's curse, or even the main one. The foundational curse is found in our separation from God. It is this separation that leads to physical and emotional problems. Jesus brings healing to all three. We can see that in the gifts Peter says come when a person repents. **"Repent therefore, and turn again, 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 for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago"** (v. 19-21).

Let's explore these three aspects of healing promised by Jesus, beginning with the most foundational one, "that your sins may be blotted out." The verb there means to wipe away completely. William Barclay says that this alludes to the fact that the ink used at this time had no acid in it and so didn't bite into the papyrus like modern inks would. So one might erase it simply by taking a wet sponge and wiping it away, much like we clean a white board with a damp cloth, leaving no trace of what had been written. All other healing is meaningless without this. Just as sin is the ultimate cause of all wounds, so the removal of sin will be the ultimate cause of all healing. Jesus has removed it by being wounded in our place. As Isaiah said, **"with his stripes we are healed"** (53:5).

The next promise is that **"times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord"** (v. 20). Such refreshing brings healing to our souls and our emotions. Refreshing comes after suffering and difficulty. I am reminded of a phrase from C. S. Lewis' *Chronicles of Narnia*, when he describes Narnia under the rule of the wicked queen as a place where "it was always winter, but never Christmas." But the curse was broken, winter thawed, and the whole

land experienced the freshness of spring's new life. I am also reminded of Wendy's labor and delivery with our first child. After 36 hours of labor, a period of time that felt to both Wendy and I that it would never end, I remember the amazing feeling that came over me when I saw about a quarter's size of my son's head. Great joy and refreshment came to us both. This refreshment begins to come when we first come to trust Jesus. We lose the fear of death, a guilty conscience, the meaninglessness of life, and there is great refreshment and hope in our new-found relationship with Jesus. But there is even more refreshment to come, and that's the next thing Peter speaks of.

He mentions the time of Jesus' return to the earth from his present rule in heaven. When he returns, he will restore all things (v. 21). The Bible teaches elsewhere that this includes the earth itself and even the entire universe. The word for restoration means literally "regeneration." It is not just people who can be born again, but nature itself will experience such a rebirth at the return of Jesus. All current healing points to its ultimate fulfillment when Jesus returns. This lame man who was healed only experienced a partial healing. At some point later in his life he got sick and died. Jesus' ultimate healing will be to make all healings permanent.

This does bring up an important question that needs to be addressed. When we say that our church is called to be a place of healing, does that include physical healing? We don't see here at AVPC the kind of physical healing this passage describes. Should we? Though God is able to bring miracles of healing at any time, it does seem that it was more common in this early age of the church than since then. Just before the miraculous healing before us in this story, Luke had said that **"many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles"** (2:43). Such miraculous healings do fade somewhat in time, even during the apostolic period. The apostle Paul prayed for a healing for himself and God said "No" (2 Cor. 12). God will heal all diseases eventually, but not always now. And even when he does, the healing is temporary. But one day, it will be permanent.

III. The Duty of the Wounded in Healing

How can a person enter into this healing? Peter makes it crystal clear that it is through repentance and faith. Peter says, **"Repent therefore, and turn again"** (v. 19). He had spoken earlier of faith when he said that it was by faith in Jesus' name that the lame man had been healed (v. 16). Since the healing power rests with Jesus, any who want such healing must go to Jesus. They do so through repentance and faith, which are not two different things but two ways of looking at the same thing. In repentance, we turn from ourselves and in faith we turn to Jesus.

Let me point out something about the faith of the lame man who was healed. Notice that the power from God came in the act of faith and not before it. It says that his feet and ankles were made strong not before he got up, but as he was getting up. He didn't wait for strength and then get up. The strength came as he got up. Even so, we don't wait for healing and then trust God. We begin to be healed as we are so bold as to believe and trust in him. Can you be so bold as to trust God now? Consider, for example, the statement Peter makes when he tells his hearers to repent and believe, **“that your sins may be blotted out.”** Can you be so bold as to believe that? Peter didn't just ask the lame man to believe the proposition that Jesus is able to heal the congenitally lame. He invited him to receive the healing by an act of faith. So when I ask you if you are willing to believe that your sins may be blotted out by the grace and power of Jesus, I'm asking you to receive that. One of Satan's most common lies is to convince a person that their sins are worse than the sins of others. A person believing this might be able to acknowledge that Jesus can blot out the sins of others; it's just his own sins that Jesus has a problem forgiving because they are especially bad. As bad as your sins might be, they can't hold a candle to those Peter was addressing. Notice that Peter accuses them directly, **“You killed the Author of life”** (v. 15). Then it becomes clear that they were opposing God, because God reversed their actions by raising Jesus from the dead. It is precisely this sin of killing the Author of life that Peter says can be blotted out. So can you be so bold as to receive this forgiveness for yourself?

CONCLUSION:

When you repent and believe and begin to receive the healing God has for you, your experience will be similar to this lame man's, who received much more than he originally asked for. When Peter and John first approached him, he just asked for money. Undoubtedly, money would have done him some good, helping to provide him with food and shelter and some comfort in the midst of his distress. But the healing God had in mind was so good as to be beyond his wildest dreams. I like the way C. S. Lewis speaks of this in *Mere Christianity* when he asks his readers to imagine themselves as a house, and we ask God to make some repairs. “At first... he is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on... But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of... You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage: but He is building a palace.” I invite you to receive God's healing so that you can become part of this healed and healing community called Altadena Valley Presbyterian Church.