

Dr. Joe Jursa's Sermon

I give you what I have - Acts 3:1-10

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. ⁴ Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ All the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Peter and John are going about their everyday life events. This was not some special day. They were not out looking for God to do a miracle through them. This was just another day that was like so many other days for them, included a visit to the temple to pray. How many of you come by the church at some point in the week to visit or to pray. Peter and John were doing the same kind of thing.

It was an ordinary day in the life of the cripple man as well. As a matter of fact, it was his regular activity. Friends brought him to the temple by the gate called Beautiful every day about 3 in the afternoon to catch people going in to prayer so that he might beg for alms thus making a living.

Peter and John seem to be his first customers of the day. He puts out his hand with the cup or the bowl or whatever he was using to indicate that they could drop coins here to help him out. But Peter and John had no monies to give. That is when the Spirit of God seems to take over in this exchange.

Peter says, "But what I have I give you." Before we go any further I want us to stop and hear what Peter is really saying. He cannot give what he does not have. He has no money so he cannot give the beggar money. We cannot give what we do not ourselves have.

Occasionally I am at a store or drive through restaurant and Bree is there in the convertible. She regularly gets asked if she wants to sell the convertible. But, when I am standing there I love answering for her. "No she cannot sell you that car, her dad won't let her." It is not hers; she just drives it for now.

The cripple beggar looked up at Peter and John hoping for some money to help him get through the day. Like every business man, every working man, even every poor man he was looking for whatever he could get to add to what he would have to bring home for the days efforts. From his bed on the sidewalk outside of the gate where he begged daily, the man lame from birth held up his hand and asked for whatever they could spare.

Peter and John apparently had no money, but they had something that was of worth, that they were willing to share with him. Obviously they were dedicated and well schooled members of St. Paul. They understood their primary task in life was to Share God's love. That is our first vision for St. Paul, to be a fellowship of believers who looks for ways to share God's love with people.

"I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." This is no exchange of words without context. The beggar is sitting beside the gate called beautiful collecting alms like he does each afternoon at about this time. Peter and John are headed to time of prayers when their paths cross and the disciples see the opportunity to share something of Jesus with this man.

They do not have money but the man is seeking something from them, so Peter obliges. While I don't have money says Peter, I will give you something of value. The man with expectant eyes follows

Peter's conversation. Maybe the man will give him a piece of jewelry or some item of clothing or possibly some food stuffs. I have a friend in Miami who never carries any cash because of beggars, but always carries a bag of rice and some Vienna sausages in the trunk of their car and they always have food vouchers from some local restaurants for people who are truly hungry.

This man was truly hungry. He was there in the sun of the afternoon to get what he could to satisfy his needs and maybe to help satisfy the needs of his extended family back home.

I want you to hear the order in which Peter answers his asking. "I have no gold or silver" in other words I don't have what you are usually expecting people to give you.

Next he says, "But what I do have I give you." In other words I have something that is valuable that you might want and be willing to accept instead of what you had expected. Now he has peeked the man's interest. He does not have money but he has something that is valuable that he is willing to give me. He turns his eyes clearly on Peter now expecting something from him.

Immediately Peter takes the focus off of himself because he in himself has nothing of value for this man, but he says, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." What you are getting is not mine; it comes from the hand of Jesus. I am passing along this valuable thing that has never really been mine; I just got it for a time from Jesus for a moment like this. I am here to pass this blessing along, this blessing that comes from the hand of Jesus. "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk."

And immediately Peter reaches out grabs the man by the right hand and lifts him to his feet. Whose faith is at work here? This guy is sitting on the side of the road, when he is told that he is about to receive a gift from this Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I don't know if he even knows who Jesus is? Maybe he never heard the stories of healing or resurrection or even the name. Maybe because he has been lame since birth he has never been allowed to enter the temple and hear about the promise of the Messiah, the Christ who is coming to set Israel free.

But when Peter speaks before the man has time to ask a question or get clarification about what was just said. Peter reaches out his hand, takes the other man's extended hand and helps to raise him to his feet. And in that moment as he was lifted from the bed on the side of the road scripture says God healed his legs and straightened his feet and the man was able to stand.

You want to know why people are not beating the doors down to get into our sanctuary. Because you have not spoken the name of Jesus and extended your hands and raised people up onto their feet! Let me repeat that...

Peter didn't have money to begin a program for cripples that they might be fitted for braces or their legs might be strengthened by physical therapy. This man was not in need of a bus ticket or a meal or some self help group. When his eyes met the eyes of Peter something happened in Peter by the Spirit of God that said, God can handle this one.

And Peter spoke and acted and he processed what happened later. He just knew in a moment that the Spirit had directed him to love this man in a very particular way. He spoke the name of Jesus and loved in through a hand shake that lifted him to his feet.

In a few moments you will leave this building and your ordinary week will begin. Will you be stopping by the church this week? What if a beggar is there and God's Spirit makes certain you are penniless that afternoon? Could you be willing to love him in another way?

You came this morning like we do so often when we come to worship to get something out of the service, to have our own hearts fed, to find strength for this next week, or to bind up the wounds from the past week. But what if God wanted you to come so that when the Spirit spoke on the ordinary day of Tuesday and asked you to reach out and touch someone in a way they had never expected that your heart was ready to share the love of God.

Sharing God's love is what we are fundamentally about church! If what you do is give money, or nail in nails to hold up walls, or collect food to feed the hungry; if what we do is warehouse children in a safe environment so parents can work, or give youth a place to congregate where they are watched and cared for and do not mention Jesus, we are not the church of Jesus Christ.

When Peter has the man attention the first words out of his mouth are IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH. You cannot share the love of God if you never tell them what you are doing is because of the love God has for them.

Don't hand a beggar a coin if you are not going to tell them Jesus loves you. Don't put a roof over a families head and think you have encouraged them to be loved by God if you never mentioned that God had sent you.

Peter said, "I don't have any money to give to you, but what I do have I give you." IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH, rise up and walk. And don't speak his name if you are not then willing to reach out your own hand and help their un or struggling belief.

It was God loving this man through the very hand of Peter that made that love real. And he walked and he leapt and he praised God.

I don't know why you think you came to church this morning. But some of you came because this week God is going to take an ordinary day in your life and allow his Love to become real to someone else because you will speak the name of Jesus and you will take someone by the hand and raise them up.

We are the people who Share God's love. The world has scores of do gooders and droves of well wishers and hordes of people who want to infect them with joy. But people are transformed when the people of God share God's love.