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“Raised to a New Life”

Text: Acts 3:1-21; Luke 24:36-49; 1 John 3:1-7

Alleluia! Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

We don't know much about this man. We don't know his name or the names of his parents. All we know is that he had been born lame (Acts 3:2) and had been unable to walk for over forty years (Acts 4:22). And that everyday some kind people carried him to a gate of the Temple so he could beg. So he could, with every person going into or coming out of the Temple, lower his eyes and raise his hands and beg for mercy. That was his life.

I wish I knew how many gave him help. I wish I knew if they were like us, like me, suspicious of those people I see on street corners or Metro stations, with cardboard signs, asking for my help. How many passed by looking the other way? How many pretended not to hear or see? How many thought ill of him, that he would just use their money on drugs or drink, and so justify their lack of compassion? Yet everyday the man was back, eyes down and hands up, begging for mercy. That was his life.

Until one day, Peter and John approached his gate. The lame man did as he did for everyone, but instead of filling his hands, Peter filled his ears and said: *I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk* (Acts 3:6)! And he did. And from that moment **he clung to Peter and John**, as the first reading today began. He would not let them go, those who had given him not just healed legs, but a new life.

And soon a crowd gathered, for the man was causing quite a scene. For he was not only walking, but, we are told, he was leaping about and praising God (Acts 3:9). This was not proper Temple behaviour and etiquette, and so people were running to see who or what was causing such a commotion. And so with a great crowd of people now gathered around him, Peter preached. Just as he had preached to the lame man, so he preached to the crowd. They hadn't done this amazing thing, *Jesus did*. Yes, *that* Jesus! Of Nazareth. The same Jesus they had rejected and traded for a murderer, the same Jesus they had crucified and thought was dead, the same Jesus whose grave was empty because - their leaders were telling them - His body had been stolen to perpetuate His hoax - guess what? *That* Jesus was alive, risen from the dead, and still doing powerful things, like making men lame from birth walk. A dead Jesus couldn't do that. Peter and John were witnesses of His resurrection, and now these people were witnesses of His living power.

Now, we're not told, but I'll bet you could just about hear a pin drop at that moment . . . because of the lumps in their stomachs and throats. They had Him crucified and now He's back? What's He going to do to them? What will be His revenge on them? For that's what people do; that's what they were used to. An eye for an eye. But that's when Peter tells them: no revenge. He has come back *to forgive*. You! ***Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*** Or in other words: Jesus was raised, Jesus raised this man, and He wants to raise you too.

Peter knew that and could preach that because not that long ago, he had been in the very same place as those in that crowd. We heard it in the Gospel from Luke today. The twelve had let Jesus down, they had denied Him and run away, and so when He appears to them they are ***startled and frightened***, thinking they saw a ghost and perhaps wondering what Jesus would now do to them. But no revenge; no chastising or finger shaking that they should have done better, been stronger. No. Instead, there is forgiveness and peace *for them*. And Jesus then *opens their minds*, to clean out all the sin and junk, all the fear and despair, all the worldly and wrong thinking, and fill it with His Word and truth and love. That just as He was risen from the dead, and now they had been raised from their sin and fear and doubt, so now they go out and preach, proclaiming ***repentance and forgiveness of sins . . . in his name to all nations***. That Jesus is not dead, but alive and well, and continuing His life giving work. Only now through men, through words, through Sacraments. But the same mercy, the same forgiveness, and same new life. He will ascend, but the work will go on, when they ***are clothed with power from on high***.

And it has, and it is! For the gate of the Temple is now here, **at this font**, where perhaps your parents or friends brought you to receive the mercy and forgiveness and new life of Jesus.

The gate of the Temple is now here, **at this pulpit**, where your ears are filled with the preaching of the living Jesus and all that He has done for you. That by His Word and Spirit your minds be opened and all the sin and junk and wrong thinking be cleaned out and you instead be filled with His Word and truth.

The gate of the Temple is now here, **before this altar**, where you come with your eyes cast down to the ground in repentance and your hands lifted up for mercy, to receive from Him what you need the most - and given in those wonderful words: *I forgive you all your sins*.

And the gate of the Temple is now here, **at this table**, where the risen and living Jesus gives you His own Body and Blood, the new food of the new life that starts now and never ends.

And thus just like that lame man, you have been raised to a new life. He was over forty years old when it happened to him - for some of you it may have been forty days, forty hours, or even forty minutes after your birth; for others maybe more than forty years. But no matter how old or young, it is the same Jesus, the same power of His resurrection, His same mercy and forgiveness given to us sinful beggars, that we may have - *and live* - a new life.

And that new life is what John is encouraging in his letter, the Epistle that we heard today. He starts out: *See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.* That's who you are, he says, so don't go back. Don't go back to the old, to the sin, to the world, when you have been given what is better; what lasts not just for a time, but for eternity. You are children of God, the most high God, the creator of all things! You are the dead raised, the sinful forgiven, the old made new. You have been raised from doubt to faith, from despair to joy, from captivity to freedom, from fear to confidence. You may look the same and feel the same but you are not the same. You have been raised, just like that once-lame man, to a new life. To have - *and live* - that new life. That new life from, and in, Christ Jesus.

And so, John says, don't abide in sin. No one abiding in Christ abides in sin.

You know, the first time I read that I got the same lump in my throat and stomach as the people in the Temple when they saw the power of Jesus' resurrection and learned that He was alive. Because I still do sin, in my thoughts, my words, my deeds, my desires. Try as I might not to, I still do. But John said that no one abiding in Him, in Christ, keeps on sinning. So does that mean . . .

But then I read earlier in this same letter from John: *If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us* (1:8). And then: *If we say we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us* (1:10). And then I remembered the struggle of St. Paul, when he said: *For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I keep on doing* (Romans 7:19). And he got so frustrated with himself that he finally said: *Ach! Wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death* (Romans 7:24)?

That sounds like just at that moment it was Paul at the gate to the Temple, eyes down and hands up. He was a sinful, spiritual beggar who needed a new life, just like us. And then he points us to the answer, just like Peter and John did to the lame man that day and to the people in the Temple that day: *Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord* (Romans 7:25)!

The new life that we need Jesus is alive and here to give. Not so that we can abide and remain in sin, as if sin doesn't matter and Jesus' forgiveness means I have a "Get out of hell free" card in my back pocket, and so I get to continue to do whatever I want, all the sin I want. No, John says, **that's not who you are** anymore. That's not the new life and

new heart and new mind Jesus has given you. We'll *fall* into sin, no doubt about that. As long as we have this sinful flesh there will be times when temptation gets the better of us, and even when sin just impulsively bursts out of us. But we'll not abide there, won't stay there, 'cause that's the stuff of death, not life.

You see, John's words there are *prescriptive*, not *descriptive*. Children of God, he says, don't remain in sin, don't abide in sin. Don't stubbornly stay there. Instead, when sin knocks us down, once again lower your eyes and put up your hands, and say: *Lord, be merciful to me, a sinner*. And He is. Always ready to forgive, always ready to raise us up again with His life, always ready to restore and refresh us. To set us free again, that we live the new life He has given us, forgiving, serving, and giving, in the places He has put us, in the callings He has given to us.

And maybe, just maybe even making a commotion once in a while, like those disciples after Jesus appeared to them alive, and like that once-lame man so filled with joy. For your Saviour is alive! His resurrection is powerful, and He has raised you to a new life. Your sin cannot condemn you, satan cannot have you, and the grave will not be able to hold you. Things will not always go your way in this world and life, but you have a God and Saviour who has promised to be with you through it all, to keep and preserve and provide for you, and to bring you to everlasting life. Is that not a reason to leap and rejoice? Is that not a joy to share with others? Is that not a life worth living? Indeed it is!

For Christ is risen! [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!
Risen with life for you.

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.