

15 April 2018
Easter 3

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church

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“The Best Is Still to Come”

Text: Acts 3:11-21; 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.

Peter and John had made a lame man walk. They were going up to the Temple and this man, lame from birth, was also going - being carried there to beg. He cried out - as he had done so many times before, day after day - he cried out to Peter and John for alms, for money, a little help for a poor man. And Peter said to him: *I have no silver or gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk* (Acts 3:8)! And the man, lame from birth, did. And that is the man we heard about in the reading from Acts today. The man clinging to Peter and John and causing astonishment among the people.

You know, I wish I could do that. I wish I could say to folks with Parkinsons, Alzheimers, or Dementia: *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, be healed!* and they would be. I wish I could say to folks struggling with marriage problems: *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, your marriage be healed!* and it would be. I wish I could say to people with cancer, or people with AIDS, or people who are blind: *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, be healed!* and they would be. I wish I could do that. Wouldn't that be great? To be able to help people like that?

Or would it? Or would I be more like King Midas. Remember his story? He wanted everything he touched to turn to gold. And he was granted that wish. But it wasn't quite what he thought it would be. He couldn't hug his children. He couldn't kiss his wife. It was fool's gold, and though it made him rich, even more it made him miserable.

Be careful what you wish for, right?

It's great to be able to help people, but not even Jesus Himself healed everyone. We read story after story of towns where Jesus was, and He was healing people, but the next morning, He's gone - He's on to the next town, leaving behind people who had wished for healing, but were not healed. And do you remember what He says in such instances? *I have to go preach to these other towns as well* (Mark 1:35-39).

You see, it's not just about healing - it's about preaching. Preaching that the Word of God is now fulfilled in this man, Jesus of Nazareth. God said He would send a Saviour, and He said this is what that Saviour would do, and He is. The miracles, the healing, preaching. The words, preaching. Preaching a Saviour. And giving us not just what we want for this life (which is passing away), but what we need for eternal life (which will never pass away).

And so what does Peter do right after healing this man? He preaches. Jesus risen from the dead, His death and resurrection fulfilling all that the prophets had said, and His death and resurrection providing for us - not healing - but the forgiveness of our sins. And while we may sometimes overlook or belittle forgiveness - as if that's not what we *really* need! What I *really* need is health or wealth or things for my life here and now - the reality is that there is **nothing we need more** than forgiveness of our sins. Health and wealth last but a few years, if you're lucky; but forgiveness is forever.

So this is what Jesus taught His disciples that first Easter evening, as we heard in the reading from Luke. He showed Himself to them, but then preached to them, how He fulfilled all that Moses and the Psalms and the prophets had said, and then He said: you now, go, and proclaim this too; *repentance and forgiveness of sins to all nations*. So that's what Peter did. And the others. They preached Jesus with their healing and with their words. They preached forgiveness.

And that gift has been given me to do. And while our Lord is still healing people today - sometimes in miraculous ways and sometimes through more ordinary ways, with medicines and doctors and such - that I do not have the power to heal as Peter did is good. Because it keeps our focus in the right place. Not on you or me and how my life is right now and what I think I need and what I think God should give me! But rather on what God has given me: His Son. His Son to die for me.

And it acknowledges this, too: *that sometimes God doesn't want us to be healed!* Or at least, not yet. Is that a modern day blasphemy? Some people would say so. That how dare I! How dare I say that God might want some people to be sick, to have cancer, to have mental illnesses and diseases! That's not a loving God! You're wrong, Pastor. You're dead wrong.

Well, first . . . remember that all this sickness and disease was not God's doing. He created the world perfectly and *without* sin, sickness, disease, and death. We did all this. Us and our sin took what God created perfectly and ruined it, corrupted it, and brought death into it. *Mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa*. My fault, my own fault, my own most grievous fault.

What the prophets preached, what Jesus preached, what Peter preached, and what we still preach, is that God didn't turn His back on us even when we did that to Him and His

creation. He spoke. He promised. A Saviour. Help. Rescue. And life. And He did. And as He did, all through the centuries since, He uses a damaged creation and a damaged you and I for His good; to accomplish His good and gracious will. Cancer is not good, but He uses it for good. Mental illnesses are not good, suffering is not good, but He is able to use them for His good. And sometimes, I'm sure, when He gives us what we think we want and it turns out to be fool's gold, it is to teach us. That's not what's good. He is good. That's not what we need. We need Him.

And really, that's what God has been doing since the beginning - not just giving us stuff, **but giving us His very self**. It's just that how often do we think or say: *no, I'd rather have this instead*. This power, this privilege, this pleasure, this position, this . . . what is it for 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.*** That's what Peter preached. Which is more than good advice; it is good teaching for us still today.

Or John put it this way, in his Epistle we heard today: ***See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are.*** It's as if he is saying: *Don't you realize? Don't you realize the gift you have been given? That you are a child of God? That you've been baptized in His name? That He has given Himself to you and you belong to Him?* Sure, he goes on to say, that's hidden now. We don't look any different, and it may not look as if we are any different - it may even seem that we're worse off than others! ***But we know that when he appears we shall be like him.*** When He comes again, in glory, then we shall see, and we shall be glorious too. Cross first, then glory.

Now I'll admit, that's tough. Crosses are heavy and hard to bear. I know all of you and I know the crosses and challenges you are facing. And I'm sure there are many more I do not know. And I know no one is exempt here. You all look good on the outside, and yet inside the story is quite different. You're good at hiding it.

So let me go back to what Peter preached, something said earlier, connected to the forgiveness of sins: ***that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*** Doesn't that sound good? Refreshing? Like a big cool drink on a really hot day. Or like jumping into a pool on a hot summer day. That's what He wants for us in our troubles and trials. To drink deeply from His Word and be refreshed by His promises and Spirit and hope. To jump into the pool of our baptism and be refreshed! To remember who we are and all the promises of God given to us there, and that He will never leave you. To hear the unburdening word of His forgiveness and be refreshed! That all those failures and regrets and mistakes - big and little - that you have done and made and that weigh heavy on your hearts and minds He doesn't hold against you. And that here - eat My Body, drink My Blood and be refreshed! Here I feed you with Myself, Jesus says. Here is food to strengthen you and give you the life you need. To be refreshed.

It's not magic, and it's not like a drug, where you instantly get a high or forget all your troubles. But still, there is refreshing here for you. In Jesus. In His forgiveness. In His life.

And here means not just here in these gifts, but here in this Church. For this Church, too, is His gift to you. That you not be alone, adrift on a sea of hopelessness or despair. That you have others to help you bear your cross, or crosses; others to speak His Word to you and His forgiveness to you; others to be His blessing to you. That is always the way of it with God. *It is not good for the man to be alone.* And so the Body of Christ is placed into your mouth as the Body of Christ, the Church, gathers together to receive her Lord. And we are fed together, grow together, live together. In Him.

And you know, I wonder how old that man was who had been lame from birth? How many years his family and friends had been carrying him to the Temple, day after day, to beg? How many years has it been for you? Your troubles, trials, struggles? That man, that day, received a gift he did not expect. He asked for alms, but he was not given alms, but healing.

What are you asking for? What are you begging the Lord for? Perhaps you will not receive it either, but something better. What? When? How? I don't know. But He will appear for you. He will come to you and give Himself to you. His forgiveness. His life. And maybe more. He will fulfill His Word. Every joy, every tittle, every last Word and promise. And when He does, on that Last Day, *we will see Him as He is*. But unlike those who saw Him that first Easter night, who saw Him as He is, on that day, when we *see Him as He is, we will be like Him*. Healed. Sinless. *Finally* good, whole, and perfect again. And not just for a time, but forever.

For **Christ is risen!** [He is risen indeed! Alleluia!] **Alleluia!**
And He comes with hope and life for you.

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

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.