

Today's second reading comes from the Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 3, verses 12-19. Immediately preceding these verses is a healing of a man at the gate to the temple. The man is asking for alms but John and Peter offer healing in the name of Jesus and the man stands and walks. He begins to be recognized as the man who used to sit at the gate and ask for alms and people start to clamor around to see him. This is where we enter the story today. Listen for God's word to you this day:

When Peter saw all the people gathering around, he addressed the people, "You Israelites,^[a] why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant^[b] Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, ¹⁵and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus^[c] has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷ “And now, friends,^[d] I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ In this way God fulfilled what God had foretold through all the prophets, that God’s Messiah^[e] would suffer. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out.”

This is the word of God for the people of God...

As the people begin to register the healing that has taken place it seems they turn their attention to John and Peter, the ones who somehow enacted this healing, but Peter quickly makes clear it was not he or John who healed the man but faith in Jesus, the righteous one, the author of life, that has allowed this man to walk. A shift is happening within the walls of the temple, this is a family matter, and Peter is making sure those who are enamored by the healing understand their role in the matter.

As a reminder, Peter is Jewish, he is speaking to other Jews about Jesus, a Jew. This is the most internal of family matters you can have. The family of faith is being called to examine itself and its role in the way faith is being lived out. Peter calls to mind all the ancestors: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the God over all of them who not only glorifies the ancestors but has also glorified Jesus. Peter’s case

for Jesus' authority and power is grounded in his Jewishness, in his connection with the prophets who have come before him.

But the old saying: Sometimes the enemy we know is better than the enemy we don't know, seems to be at play here. Or, at least that seems to be Peter's point in reminding those gathered that they allowed Jesus to be killed, the one who seemed to be challenging too much of what they were comfortable with and encouraging them to embrace a different way of understanding God and embodying faith, that one, Jesus, had ways that were too outside the box of what was known, but a murderer, they knew his ways, they had seen what he does, they could have better control over him. Isn't it remarkable what we will find acceptable so that we don't have to make any changes or risk our way of life?

Peter takes a moment to let them know that he and John were witnesses to the resurrected Christ. That though Jesus was murdered they saw him raised from the dead. That though those who handed him over to Pilate had wanted to end the movement of social reorder that Jesus was enacting, they could not in fact end it, the man who once sought alms at the gate was now walking and Jesus was nowhere in sight.

Even though Jesus is no longer visibly in sight, the Christ continues to emerge out of the world, out of those with faith in a God who wants to bring healing to all, a God who longs to bring together those stuck at the gate with no way to enter, and those who walk freely in and out of the gate, to place them on equal footing, both bearers of God's image in the world.

The case that Peter is laying out to those gawking at the healed man sounds like a lead up to a good condemnation. Peter is pretty stern with them about how they've gotten Jesus wrong, misunderstood him and his message. But, condemnation is not what Peter offers, because it's not what Jesus offers. Like Jesus, Peter offers something with healing powers for them too. He turns to them and says, "friends,^[a] I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers." If you did not believe before because you could not have understood what you had not seen, or if it was all clouded in the mystery of prophetic teaching and acts, you seem to get it now, you've witnessed Christ today in this man who you know and your ignorance seems to be falling away from your mind and allowing you to see how God has fulfilled what was foretold about a Messiah even though it looks quite different from what **we** expected, now that you know, now that you see, repent, ask God to forgive you where you were wrong, where you separated yourself from God, prioritizing your own way, ignoring God right before you.

Peter does not offer condemnation. Peter offers repentance. Peter offers compassion, mercy, and an opportunity for reconciliation with God and all that is required is repentance, an acknowledgement that they got it wrong, that they'll do better, that they will change their ways.

The family of faith is threatened by the presence of Jesus, and now by the presence of Jesus' disciples. How is our family of faith threatened? In what places do we find ourselves needing to defend? How might being open to the healing nature of Christ invite us to experience God in new ways?

Rather than being open to the potential for more relationship with God, more abundant life, those who stood opposed to Jesus' teaching chose what was most comfortable, what allowed them to remain the same. And Peter shows them that they too can receive healing for the fear they are holding tightly to, healing for the places in their own lives that keep them from abundant life in relationship with God and one another. They may have heard this before, from Jesus, but it didn't stick, and Peter tells them again, it's the same as us gathering each week to be reminded whose we are and the family of faith we are called to be, in spite of our best efforts to keep God at arm's length or only for ourselves. It is a paradigm

shift from what is known to what is becoming, what is being reordered in the name of Jesus Christ, right in front of us.

Paradigm shifts are hard, they are difficult for our minds to wrap around and so we retreat to what is most familiar. Even when what is most familiar stands in direct contradiction to what we say we want. Remember last week, Jesus entered the locked room bringing peace, in the middle of the chaotic moments after the resurrection, he brought peace. He did not excuse them from going out and living their lives, he did not tell them to hunker down and remain in this place forever so they can live safe, happy lives. No, he sent them out, because the image of God in each one of us wants to connect with the image of God in others, the Christ we each carry within us longs to know the Christ in another. And when we allow those connections to happen, our human motivations and egos can finally get out of the way, no longer seeing difference as a threat to our family of faith, no longer seeing change as a threat to our family of faith, but seeing it all as opportunity to journey more deeply into relationship with God among us.

Even as people of faith, even as Christians we reject Christ daily. We turn a blind eye to Christ being killed in others through literal death, but also through acts that dehumanize and words that are used to hurt. Peter and John do not have money

to offer the man at the gate, what they have to offer is healing in the name of Jesus, healing that came with their hands helping the man stand, and allowing him to hold onto them as they walked through the temple portico, not for attention, not for recognition, but because that was how Jesus showed them to care for those in need. To bring healing, to invite in, to walk with, to share in common, to offer peace.

Friends, we must repent of the ways we continue to walk by those with outstretched hands, those crying out in pain, we must stop closing off our hearts and our minds to the suffering around us and as the hands and feet of Christ in this world, we must offer healing to one another, we must ensure that keeping out the things we believe threaten our family of faith do not in fact become the end of faith in Christ for ourselves and for the world. Christ is offering us healing, not in the form of religious exceptionalism or family bonds that cannot be broken, but in the form of love, justice, healing, and reconciliation. Let us be the ones who share that Christ with the world.