

Acts 3:12–19; Psalm 4
1 John 3:1–7; Luke 24:36b–48

Grace to you, and peace, from God who is, who was, and who is to come. Amen.

Our two lessons that we just heard, kind of seem unrelated to each other. One is taking place immediately after Jesus has risen. The other is several weeks later. They involve entirely different congregations of people. But I think that they are related to each other. They both have a similar message.

In the First Lesson, the lesson that we get from the reading from Acts, I need to tell you the pre-qual part of it – the stuff that led up to it – right at the beginning of chapter 3 in our lesson tonight, what we didn't hear. Peter and John are walking to the temple. They are getting ready to go there to pray. As they walk they pass a man who has been crippled from birth. Apparently his feet and his ankles are deformed somehow or are not strong – the Bible doesn't go into details. But every day, scripture tells us, every day people bring him to the temple. They put him outside the gate called "Beautiful" so that as people are entering the temple they might give him money as he sits there and begs. This is how he makes his livelihood. This is how he earns a living. It is an acceptable way. It's not necessarily a really profitable way of going about earning a living, but if you can't get up and do physical labor – you know they didn't have computers back in first century Jerusalem – you couldn't sit at a desk all day. So, if you weren't able to go out and do some labor, that was about your only option.

As Peter and John are walking into the temple the man calls out to him. We don't know exactly what he says, but it was probably something like "alms for the poor, alms for the cripple. Can you help a guy who can't work?" Peter and John stop and they turn and they look at him. Now, he's done this hundreds, thousands of times in his life. He reaches up expecting to receive a coin or two. But, instead, Peter looks down, reaches out his hand and says "In the name of Jesus Christ be healed."

Peter grabs hold of the man's hand, pulls him up, and in an instant the man's his feet and ankles are made strong, the scripture says. He is standing up, he's astounded, and he follows Peter and John in to the temple. He's bouncing and jumping up and down praising God. People surround them trying to figure out what happened. "We've seen this man outside this gate for who knows how long, and here he is. We know he's crippled. We have seen his feet. We have seen his ankles, yet here he is standing. How can this be?" And that's when Peter starts in with his message. "You wonder at this, or you stare at us as though we did this to this man? No," Peter says, "it wasn't us."

In our Gospel reading tonight, what immediately precedes our Gospel reading is the story of Jesus and two followers on the road to Emmaus. It's happening, apparently, Easter evening. You might remember the story of the road to Emmaus. Two disciples of Jesus – not any of the original twelve – but two of them are going from Jerusalem to Emmaus, which is about seven miles down the road. As they are walking along a stranger comes up to them and asks them "Why are you looking so

sad?” “What, don’t you know about this Jesus and about how he’s been killed?” He says, “No, tell me about him.”

So, they start to talk and the stranger says, “No, I think you’ve got it wrong. Let me explain the scriptures to you and how this Jesus fulfilled the scriptures.” And as they walk along, this third fellow explains to (we only the name of one of the guys – his name is Cleopas – how would you like to go through life with a name like Cleopas?) – he is explaining to Cleopas and his friend as they go along how Jesus fulfilled the scriptures. By the time they reach their destination it’s night time and the stranger that they met on the road is making as though he is going to keep walking. But, they invite him in for the evening meal. As they sit down, the stranger takes bread and asks the blessing, breaks it and hands it to them, and suddenly their eyes are open, and they realize it’s Jesus. “Those women, Mary, who had gone to the tomb, the women had gone to the grave and found him raised. And we just saw him, it’s really actually true, because we’ve seen it.”

Now, it’s dusk, they’ve just walked seven miles, but they jump up and hightail it back to Jerusalem. They find the disciples upstairs in a room and they tell the disciples, “We’ve seen him for ourselves. It’s true. What Mary said – it’s really true.” And as they’re standing there, as they are standing talking to the disciples, Jesus himself stood among them and said to them, “Peace be with you.”

Can you imagine what the excitement, what heart palpitations, must have happened to the disciples as they stood there. They had seen him on the cross. They had seen enough crucifixions in their life to know that when somebody dies on the cross, they are dead, they’re gone, they’re history. Yet here he is, standing in front of them. Just like in the temple, the crippled man standing in front of the crowd. What must have been going through the minds of the people as they looked at this man, that they knew had been crippled from birth? What was going through the minds of the disciples as they stood there and looked at this man whom they had known, and loved, and followed, and seen die.

The disciples think “he’s a ghost! He can’t be real!” So what does Jesus do? “No, I’m flesh and blood. Look, look, I can make a noise. I’m solid. Give me some fish to eat, please.” He takes the fish and he eats it. He chews and He swallows. They don’t see it going down, they can’t see through him. He’s really taking the fish, he’s really chewing it. There’s a bite out of the hunk of fish there. He’s real flesh and blood. He’s really there. It’s actually, positively true.

The crippled man is standing there – or more likely bouncing there – before the people who had seen him for years. It’s really, actually true that he has been healed.

These are amazing, amazing stories. Wonderful things have happened in these stories to cause the excitement, the joy, maybe even the fear as they gather, as they look. Peter and John do not claim to be the ones who have healed this man. What do they say? “It is in the name of Jesus, and by faith in his name – in Jesus’ name itself – that has made this man strong, whom you now see and know. The faith that is through Jesus has given him his perfect health in the presence of all of you. And now, friends, and now, in this way, God has fulfilled what has been foretold: the Messiah is here.” Peter can say that with confidence, because he has seen the risen Lord for himself. He has stood in the room and watched him eat.

A little earlier in Acts, Peter and the other disciples were up in the locked room when the Holy Spirit came down upon them. They have all felt the power of God and now going forth, bringing

that message of love; bringing that message of forgiveness; bringing that message of Grace, starting there in Jerusalem. Why is that important? Because of what happened in Jerusalem. Where was Jesus killed? Where was Jesus arrested and tried and crucified? Did you listen to the words as Peter started off in his little speech to the folks there at the temple? “You rejected the holy and righteous one and asked to have a murdered given to you. You killed the Author of life.” Peter is there to remind them that they are forgiven. That is almost a more powerful miracle than a man whose feet and ankles are made whole

What is it to be forgiven, especially when we don’t ask? What is it to be forgiven, especially when we don’t deserve? What is it to be forgiven? Peter and John are giving this message of grace and love and forgiveness to the people as they gather there in the temple, to the people who may well have been the folks who just a few weeks earlier had stood outside the Sanhedrin and yelled “Crucify him!” “Repent therefore and turn to God,” he tells them, “so that your sins may be wiped out.”

Maybe there’s something in your life that you don’t feel real good about. Maybe you’ve had a falling out with someone. Maybe you’ve had a bad dealing at work. Maybe you’ve had a difficulty with a neighbor, or a spouse. Maybe you’re struggling inside. How can I forgive them? How can they forgive me? How can I forgive myself?

Peter’s words to the people in the temple – Jesus’ words to the disciples there the room – You are loved. You are forgiven. Forever and always. These wonderful words of God’s grace, and love, and forgiveness that make us whole. That bind us not only to God but bind us to one another as well.

We are forgiven. And we are called to go forth in Christ’s name, telling others of God’s love and grace. Jesus reminds the disciples, you are witnesses. Jesus reminds us as well. We, too, all of us, are witnesses of God’s love and grace. Let us go forth rejoicing, jumping, bouncing, telling the world of God’s love.

Amen.

Copyright © 2008, John H. Brock. All rights reserved.