

American Lutheran Church of Sun City

The Fourth Sunday of Easter

April 20 – April 21, 2024

Rev. Scott Klimke

Page | 1

Acts 4:5-12

1 John 3:16-24

John 10:11-18

Last week, Peter preached a sermon calling for repentance in the vicinity of Jerusalem's Temple. We weren't told about its impact, but in the verses preceding today's follow-up reading we're told five thousand ultimately answered Peter's call to repent. It surely didn't hurt that the call for repentance was preceded by the healing of a lifelong paralytic. With Jesus so obviously out of the grave and on the loose for good through his Church, repentance was surely more attractive than usual. Then again, the miracle didn't lead the religious muckety-mucks in today's reading from Acts to repent one bit. Miracles are subject to interpretation; having much to do with the eye of the beholder. Miracles, it would seem, are not always going to jump out and grab our attention; announcing themselves as miracles in such a way that precludes debate or doubt. And with Jesus promising he would be found most often not on red carpets or under the bright lights, but with the last and the least, maybe this is to be expected.

As for miracles flying under the radar, make sure not to miss Peter today. A few months before testifying before the religious elite, Peter had cowered before the same players; doubting God so much, fearing for his neck so much, that he denied our Lord three times as Jesus had his

own run-in with the religious muckety-mucks asserting themselves again today. A coward became a convicted and courageous witness in less time than it takes a baby to be born. It's a miracle. In a matter of months, Peter miraculously goes from being lame and immobile before the powers that be to someone who's got legs of faith ready to stand firm and tall before them. It's a miraculous healing we might miss if we weren't paying close attention.

Now add the paralytic Peter and John healed last week to the picture I'm starting to paint. Paralyzed from birth, we later learn he was lame for more than forty years. Highly interesting! This person was incapable of forward movement, of any movement whatsoever, for longer than it took Israel to learn how to walk a straight line into the Promised Land. Let's also not forget that he lies lame before Jerusalem's Temple. Those who ran Jerusalem had become so self-interested, so self-serving that from the start they were looking for a way to kill Jesus whom they considered to be a threat to the arrangement they had secured for themselves. These folks had become self-serving bureaucrats who made it their business to fleece and shake down the faithful; including taking every last cent a poor widow had available for life's necessities. But with Peter's one example already, maybe not everyone had legs of faith as sure and strong as Jesus. With the paralytic perhaps representative of the many, maybe severe atrophy had overcome whatever legs of faith they had. Maybe they laid down in cowardice and apathy and rendered themselves lame before those intent on keeping them wandering in the wilderness so an already fat priesthood and upper class could have the Promised Land all to themselves. With this in mind, might it be a miracle occurs every time the Church's ministry gives legs of faith to someone; legs of faith so strong and so sure that the formerly lame can now get up and walk away from oppressive forces that hurt them and that will eventually hurt all of us later?

Remember also that Jesus' most basic call to repentance and a life of discipleship is "follow me". When Peter, Andrew, James, and John answer this call, they walk away from the fish nets that had formerly occupied all their attention. In so doing they walk away from a life spent trying to fish dollars out of the sea before someone else got to those dollars first. How's that for a living? Help myself at my neighbor's expense before they do the same to me. This sure doesn't sound like an ideal way to live. And when tax collectors like Levi got up from their booths and followed Jesus, they walked away from an alliance with a foreign Empire that stuffed its mouth and its pocket at everybody else's expense and crucified those who objected to its treating people as if they were only cows to be milked. And by the way, the same Empire winked and looked away when its local enablers took a little extra for themselves. It's how the Roman Empire stuffed its mouth and its pocket so effectively. It made sure its enablers were well-compensated; using supposed self-interest to turn neighbor against neighbor; citizen against the community.

When we think about what the first disciples did when they answered the call to repent and follow after Jesus, it becomes clear that repentance often involved walking away from those people and things which continue to make it necessary for us to pray, "Thy will be done on earth, on earth, as it is in heaven." In any number of possible ways, repentance finds us walking away from anything that holds us or others down so someone else might profit instead; whether that someone be us personally, another party, or some combination of the two. This surely does bring a whole other level of understanding to what we can think about when we hear the Bible speak of lame people being healed. Beyond the physical change that may have been involved, the miracle that visited their lives freed them from bondage to sin and gave them legs of faith. Once lame and immobile, they were now able-bodied enough to walk away from the oppressive

arrangements of yesterday and today and towards the new tomorrow where both heaven and earth are reflective of God's will; where no one slips through the cracks; where no one has less than they need because others have more than they need; the new tomorrow where it's understood that the long-term cost of abandoning each other shall exceed greatly the temporary benefit of keeping out of the fray and abandoning those we leave behind to this or that wolf that threatens them first and then all of us later. And though they often don't take place out on red carpets or under bright lights, I'm here to tell you these kinds of miracles still take place today.

Let me close with an example. There's someone who's lost a hundred pounds. After a failed first marriage, they're also married, gainfully employed, and a loving parent. I'm here to tell you all of this has been a walk away, a highly miraculous walk away, from oppressive ghosts before which the person once lay lame and paralyzed. When I first got to know them, I knew they were angry with their grandmother and an aunt. But I didn't know why. Once again not fully aware of the dynamics in prayer, I was also floored and flabbergasted when in premarital counseling it came out that the person was marrying someone who associated love with being rough and hurtful. This was a marriage heading nowhere, but my concerns weren't heard until it was too late. After the marriage fell apart, I came to know what I didn't know before. As a child, the person had been abused by an older cousin. They were mad with their grandmother and aunt because they lived in denial and came to the cousin's defense; opening the door for the abuse to continue. The only person who defended the person was a mother who died young; only adding to the trauma underway. I think you might now understand why the only way to describe the recovery that's been happening for a while now is with the word "miracle." I'm aware it's a miracle that involves some real darkness. But we don't always live in a pretty world. Oppression and abuse happen every day in ugly and horrific ways. We do no one any favors if we deny this.

We also do no one any favors if we remain quiet about the under-the-radar miracles which find people breaking free and as they are no longer lame or immobile walking towards something more like the Promised Land God wants all of us to one day call home forever. In the end, the number of these miracles doesn't matter. It's their existence that matters. And I'm here to tell you the word of resurrection and release in Christ Jesus the Church has to share is as persuasive and powerful as ever; persuasive and powerful enough to give legs of faith to the lame so that oppression and injustice might be left behind and the Promise Land that lies ahead embraced.

Amen!