

Dec. 3, 2017

Lesson 1: Faith in Jesus

Scripture: Acts 3: 1-11

Context:

Our focus on this season is to look at how faith comes into action. The first unit focuses on the early church proclaiming its faith in Christ. The first few lessons will take us to the history textbook of the church, the book of Acts. There, we will begin to learn how the early church came to understand Jesus and how that impacted their community of faith in the way that they believed and functioned.

The story we read today comes from after the church is born and is in its early days. In chapter two of Acts, we read the story of Pentecost and how the Holy Spirit came among the early believers. Following this experience, there were converts and Peter and the other apostles were sent to tell the Good News about Jesus. Everyone was in awe and the early church was a place where they shared their possessions and took care of one another.

The account today is the first healing miracle in the Book of Acts as well as the second major speech of Peter. It is at the portico of Solomon that Peter and John heal a lame man who has been that way since birth. The man has been healed by the name of Jesus, someone who had been killed in the place of a murderer. Peter launches into his proclamation that this miracle is done in the name of Jesus, the one who was foretold by the prophets and the one whom God has promised. Knowing his audience, Peter pulls back to scriptures from the prophets and others. Here is the Lord who is the awaited Christ. Even though he is gone and in the heavens as all things are being restored.

It is important as we read this passage to remember that the church is trying to figure out their identity especially with all the conversions. Disciples like Peter and John adhered to the traditional Jewish beliefs and practices with the understanding that Jesus was the Messiah. At this time in Acts, Jesus is still only available to those who are already a part of God's chosen people. Thus, Peter's choice of words is to help them understand that Jesus is one of them. He is making a bold claim, one that will reach and stretch across the Roman Empire.

A note while reading this text is not to shame the Jewish people or to lead to anti-Semitic thoughts. Instead we are to read the text understanding that the early church was trying to figure out who they would be and how they saw Jesus. What Peter is trying to do is trying to help them see a new Israel, one that has a different appeal and understanding to those around them.

Application:

As I read this text, one of the things that jumped out to me was the focus on "the faith in Jesus' name." Here it doesn't say: "YOU must have faith," or "the man had great faith and was healed," or "the disciples had great faith and their faith was what did the healing." Instead, the power belongs to Jesus. Jesus is the one who holds the power and glory.

The focus is not to be on Peter or John at all. It is about Jesus and what Jesus does in and around us. It's not about our abilities or what we think we know; it is about Jesus

is the one that is in control. Jesus will be the Christ whether we like it or not.

I find this passage to be very relieving in the sense that God is at work around me and even sometimes in spite of me. I don't have to be the one to fix people or to have all the answers. God is the one who does all of that and will sometimes make us whole in ways that we don't even realize until later on.

Several weeks ago, our staff took a spiritual gifts test. All of us were delighted to either have our gifts confirmed or be surprised at which ones were our highest ranked. (For those who are curious, my highest were teaching, encouraging, pastor teacher/shepherding, mercy, and knowledge.) But the best part came when we were put together in different groups for a project at our church. The groups were divided on the diversity of gifts. When it came time to pick a leader, my group nominated and chose me. As I began to object, a member of my group whose highest gift was faith said, "I have faith that you will be able to do this and God will see you through. See, I'm using my gift." With that quote we all laughed and I agreed to be the team leader.

I use this story though to make the point that God often gets in our way and does what God wants to do. Our imperfections and objections are not as important as that God will still use us. When Jesus came to the earth he did a lot of amazing things and healed many people. And when he left, his disciples continued that work. In their case though, they didn't use it to gain power or prestige. Instead, they truly believed that it God working in and through them. Just the name of Jesus held power and gave them all that they needed to live and be.

Perhaps that is what this passage speaks to our lives today. Jesus has already made us whole. We don't have to prove anything to anyone and yet Jesus will still use us for good. Even when we don't have that faith for the good of the world, God does and so do others around us. Faith in Jesus' name means that all will be made well even if we cannot see it at the time.

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