

Wednesday of Pentecost Week

Preached at Lutheran Theological Seminary in Tshwane (Pretoria, South Africa)

27 May 2015

Text: Acts 3:1-10

Theme: “We Are Beggars”

Dear Friends:

Luther’s last words, found written down at his bedside, are well known by Lutherans: “We are beggars; that is true.” The cynic would say to the church, “You obviously are: you are always asking for money.” In our text here, however, we see this reality played out very nicely. Looking for money, the man who was brought to the Beautiful Gate was brought there in order to ask for alms, that it is order to beg. The ninth hour, the hour of prayer, saw this beggar asking that he might receive enough to get his sustenance, his daily bread, for the day. What he actually received was something far greater. He received his legs. Lame, crippled, from his mother’s womb, this man had not been able to walk a day in his life. Not a single step.

To him, Peter and John were no different than any of the other men who passed by that day. They were men who might be able to help him with his daily needs. How different from when the crowds followed Jesus! There the lame, the deaf, the blind constantly cried out, “Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!” Here, there is nothing about these two men that would call attention to them, so the man asked what he would ask any one that day: for alms. Indeed, his cry was a general cry to anyone who would listen. No doubt his attention stopped on them because they stopped in front of him. They stopped and they looked at him. Naturally, he then looks back at them. He clearly expects something. Perhaps his curiosity turned to disappointment when he heard Peter’s first words: “Silver and gold have I none.” What he needed, or thought he needed most, he was not going to receive.

But Peter’s next words were amazing. “But what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus, rise up and walk!” In the name of Jesus. That name had been spoken about for a while now, what with the apostles’ preaching on Pentecost. People had heard of the work of Jesus, and now healing was brought about in the name of Jesus. Jesus Himself had said that the lame walking, the blind seeing, the deaf hearing, were signs that the Kingdom had arrived. Now, though Jesus was no longer on the scene, these things were continuing to happen as Jesus’ chosen disciples were continuing His work.

This miracle certainly got the attention of those around them. Most certainly because the man who had been born a cripple was now running around and jumping up and down for joy. This was clearly the hand of God at work.

As we look at this for our own ministries, there are a few things to which we must pay attention. To those who are hurting, who have disabilities, severe ailments, or who are close to people that do, the question, “Why isn’t God still doing these things today?” certainly comes to mind. “I have my needs, and my neighbor has his. Why aren’t we being helped?” We do reach out to those who are suffering. God may not directly, supernaturally, heal, but he does send those who have the proper vocation to assist them in their needs as part of His providential care for the world. Jesus did not heal every sick person who crossed His path, nor raise all the dead. Or better put, He hasn’t done it *yet*. The healings, the miracles, even if they do not meet everyone’s immediate needs, do demonstrate that the Kingdom of God has arrived and is in our midst. So also our prayers go out to God for them in the midst of their needs, always couched in the words, “Thy will be done.”

But we must not forget the final sign of the Kingdom: “The poor have good news preached to them.” The ongoing sign, the one in which we are called and authorized to continue, is the preaching of the good news. For the account of this miracle follows the record of Peter’s Pentecost sermon, the fulfilment of the promise that God would pour out His Spirit on all flesh, and his declaration that God has publicly proclaimed Jesus as the Christ through raising Him from the dead. As a result, people were brought to faith and people gathered together to continue in the apostles’ teaching, for breaking of bread, and for prayer. As the crowds gathered after this miracle, again Peter preached the good news of the Kingdom. The poor in spirit are given the riches of the Kingdom. And so that preaching continues today. Like the man at the Beautiful Gate, we are beggars in need of mercy, and we have heard a word which gives us life. It is a word that gives us undeserved forgiveness as it has given in down through the ages. Nothing in our hands we bring. Simply to the cross we cling. With this message the Spirit continues to act, continues to bring people to faith and sustains them in the midst of the struggles of this life. Even though we may not be called to heal the sick and raise the dead, we are called to bring the message of the one who has done that and who on the Last Day will bring the suffering of the saints to an end and will bring all the dead to life and give eternal life to all who believe. Knowing this we do not lose heart, we do not despair, but move forward constantly, knowing that Christ will prevail. As we have received, so we also give. For that we give thanks to God and give all glory to God. Amen.

