

Sermon: Acts 3:1-16

Acts of the Spirit: The Church Becoming Like Jesus A Church that Heals Like Jesus

- I got to be part of an FPC Care Team meeting last Monday night. Care Team members pursue friendships, walking with persons in our congregation and beyond to offer care and support, often through transitions grief, or job loss. Colin McKearnan brought the opening devotional that night. We start meetings with reflection and prayer because it helps all of us keep remembering just who God is who we are in is his love as we enter into our ministry together.

Colin invited us to watch a short excerpt of a graduation speech from Father Gregory Boyle. As some may know, Father Boyle has given decades to a ministry among gang members in LA. He leads Homeboy Industries, which offers rehabilitation and reentry, finding meaningful work for like 10,000 gang members a year. Garbage removal. Tattoo removal. A bakery. Because of his work leading MIC's social enterprise ministry with the Get It Done Crew here in Missoula, Colin got a tour of Homeboy Industries in LA and said he's never seen such an astonishing embodiment of Christ's love. I want to share with you this morning what Colin shared with the FPC Care Team:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zk--XN4ozr8> (to 5:38)

Along with Melanie Mellgren, Colin helps lead our church's Emergency Overflow Shelter during extreme cold snaps when the Poverello Center is overrun. After introducing this video, Colin wanted to encourage us to pay attention to the humanity in persons we may have become accustomed to avoiding. To sit on the ground with strangers. To look our neighbors in the eye. Because, he said, that's what the love of Jesus looks like.

-Our sermon series in the Book of Acts is about how the Spirit acts in people apprenticed to Jesus so that we come to take on family resemblance to him. Today is about a Church that heals. Our passage is from Acts 3.1-16.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. 2 And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. 3 When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. 4 Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." 5 And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. 6 Peter said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." 7 And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. 8 Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. 9 All the people saw him walking and praising God, 10 and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and astonishment at what had happened to him.

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Let's pray: O Lord, fill us with a countercultural love, and upside-down kingdom love, a Jesus love, a faith in love, a healing love for neighbor, outcast, and enemy, so that we might all of us be led by you back to our true selves. Amen.

-OK. So there's this guy who's been crippled from birth. Unable to walk. People carry him to beg at Temple gate at the time of prayer. Where people pass him by and he can call out to them. Imagine what his life is like. How does it feel?

They say one of the loneliest professions, the job linked with the most self-harm, is the toll booth operator. The toll booth operator, where thousands of cars slow, toss money, and pass you by, without ever looking you in the eye.

Then there are Peter and John...On the springtime side of the resurrection. On the birdsong side of the pouring out of the Spirit.

Two men who, after deserting Jesus in the end, have been sought out. Forgiven. Embraced. Restored by the risen Jesus. Two men sent out not by their own power but by the power of the Spirit of Christ to embody his vindicated compassion and healing. Peter and John are, like all of us, apprentices. Learning Jesus' Way of love.

So the man who is disabled calls out to them. He asks for alms. A gift that could demonstrate that their relationship is a sacred, spiritual matter. He asks without expectation of connection. Just the handout.

And what happens?....The Bible says that Peter looks at him intently, as does John. They don't pass him by. They don't avert their eyes. They look at him. And more. They see him.

Is it your experience that often the most humble, most compassionate people are those who have themselves suffered hardship. Suffering, sin, shame – they can lead to hardened bitterness. But given to the Lord, our anguish can be transformed into the compassion of Christ.

Why is Mario the kindest, gentlest, most humble and tender person and former gang member at Homeboy Industries? His violence has been suffused in and given over to the love of Jesus. He understands the anguish of his brothers and sisters – what it means to be crushed by the weight of it. And so he sees persons as children of God.

I gotta think that Peter (in his particular experience of betrayal and shame and grace) has had his eyes changed. That now Peter has new eyes, post-resurrection eyes. Do you?

So not only does Peter look intently at this man whose life has been crippled. Did you notice? He invites the man to look into their eyes as well.

The tragedy for persons who've sat begging is that while they may call out to you or direct you to their sign, they may also lower their eyes to guard themselves from watching people pass them by, to guard their hearts from being scorned or ignored. Peter wants this man to see in his look – and in John's – that they count him a brother. Even before there's been consideration of this man's legs, Peter extends the healing and wholeness of regarding him with dignity.

We often let our confusion about what we can or should do – especially about money – rob a moment of healing human connection and risky faith. Not Peter. Not Jesus' apprentice. Money matters. Money can of

course be well-used to help (think of the story of the Samaritan who pays for someone to heal up). But more powerful, more transforming, is the Person, the Name, the Hope of Jesus alive. 'We don't have cash on us,' he says. 'But what we have, we want for you. Healing. Wholeness. And Hope in Jesus.'

'In the name of Jesus, stand up and walk.' Peter's is an act of not only compassion, but trust in the heart of God for broken bodies, minds and spirits to be healed. It's the confidence of hope that Christ is alive not only to strengthen this man's ankles, but to restore his humanity and guide his steps. To renew his whole life, not as a project, but as a person.

On this side of the resurrection Peter and John do what Jesus did by the power of the Spirit. They offer the healing, wholeness, and hope of God.

-Friends, who do you think of when you long for the healing of Jesus? Whose body is broken? Whose mind is aching? Whose spirit is withering? Whose soul is in anguish?

Marina Abramovic is a performance artist. For several months in the spring of 2010, New York City's Museum of Modern Art hosted an event called The Artist is Present. Ms. Abramovic sat silently in a chair for eight hours a day, and she invited the public to sit across from her one at a time while looking into each other's eyes. Fifteen hundred people took her up on it. Some sat poker-faced, some smiled, some cried, and one even sat for seven hours. They all of them came to participate in the giving and receiving of presence. Call it soul gazing. The moment revealed the human need for connection. For healing intimacy. (Greg Levoy. Psychology Today article: Beyond Words: The Power of Eye-Gazing)

There's a Kelly Corrigan interview with Father Boyle (on PBS, 'Tell Me More.') In the conversation, Father Boyle offers a simple framework for treating trauma, which we could count at some level to be the condition of the human soul. He says, 'If it's true that the traumatized are more likely to cause trauma,' (you know, the idea that hurt people, hurt people) 'then it's equally true—it has to be—that a cherished person is going to be able to find their way to the joy there is in cherishing themselves and others.'

Father Boyle describes the healing process as 'dosing' – the more doses of being cherished, the more a person may come to cherish themselves and others.' It's what the woman who asked Mario the question offered him, a reflection of how much he is cherished by God.

It's healing to be noticed, understood, embraced, affirmed as God's children, as persons of sacred worth. And, I recognized listening to the Care Team on Monday, that when we become intentional about seeing and cherishing the humanity in our neighbors, it turns out that Jesus is restoring us to ourselves, too. The invitations to be together. The gracious listening. The acts of caring. The shared prayers. Why do they do it? Because it heals them, too. Because dosing heals us all. Because care-giving is care-receiving.

- In the end, this man at the Temple gate is transformed by the love of Christ flowing through his apprentices. The word 'church' means the people called out of the worldly ways to love in the supernatural way of Jesus. It's miraculous. And this man's ankles are made strong. He jumps up walking and leaping and praising God.

The healing of Christ is a mystery. I've prayed (and I know you've prayed desperately) for bodies to be healed and watched as persons thought to be near death recovered to walk and leap and praise God. And

I've prayed (and I know you've prayed desperately) for bodies to be healed and watched as persons do not physically recover and weaken and die.

I've prayed for broken marriages to be renewed. Some have seen renaissance beyond my dreams, while others have broken on the rocks. I've prayed for legal disasters and financial crisis and brain tumors, and I've prayed for children in harm's way and thorny mental health struggle and persons fallen into addictions that seem hopeless. I've prayed for healing in Jesus' name. Often the Lord has not answered my prayers as I would have imagined. And Often I've seen a redemptive thread stitched through heartache to form a miraculous tapestry of healing joy I would have been incapable of naming.

Peter and John saw not an inconvenience or a project, but a person and brother. They saw Mario. They invited him to see them see him as a child of God. They called upon the power of Jesus' love for healing and wholeness. They risked dosing him with how much he was cherished. And they trusted Christ to heal him how he would./

Friends what do you hear the Lord saying to you in this Scripture?

What does this passage invite us to pray?