

**First Baptist Church of Augusta**  
**Acts 3:1-10**  
***Walk This Way: Helping or Healing?***  
**August 24, 2008**

Acts 3:1-7

*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] But 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.*

We have been following the disciple Peter and the rest of the Twelve for about a month now. Jesus' call to follow began along the Sea of Galilee. It has taken them through a storm. It has asked of them to let go of everything for his sake. The call has reminded them to forgive and keep on forgiving, and to feed a hungry world. For these next two Sundays, we will see how these disciples follow Jesus now that Jesus has left them on earth.

Instead of the scene unfolding on or near the sea, we find them near the temple. A beggar outside the temple during a crowded time of prayer would have been nothing out of place. The faithful Jew had three primary responsibilities: the study of scripture, worship, and sharing with the poor. There were three times in the day that Jews prayed: nine, noon and three. If one could not get to the temple in Jerusalem, then one was to face in the direction of the temple.

The lame beggar outside the temple would not have been a particularly unusual sight. Chances are, there were others, too, doing the same thing – asking for help. One can imagine that as people hurried by on the way to prayer, they would toss a coin their way, without so much as a glance.

Have you ever done that? Helped somebody that was asking for a handout, and responded to their request without really looking them in the face? Maybe they needed a tank of gas or a little food money or a meal. There have been times I have helped someone, solely because I wanted to get rid of them. I am just being honest. For the last several years whenever I went to a baseball game at Turner stadium, I would see this one fellow in a motorized wheelchair. He would rattle a plastic cup, and if he ever caught your eye, he would ask directly for a donation. I found it best just to not look him in the eye, ignore him, and pretend that he just did not exist.

This, however, is not what Peter and John do. In the text we read: *Peter looked intently at him, as did John...*(v. 4). Peter then spoke to the beggar directly and said: *"Look at us."* *And he fixed his attention on them...*

What does it mean to follow Jesus?

### **Following Jesus Means Paying Attention**

I have on other occasions, confessed my attention deficits. My mind wanders. A few weeks ago, Joanne Carr and I were returning from a meeting in Macon, and as I was driving through Gray, Georgia, I approached a red light and began to slow down. As I was slowing down the light turned green, but I continued to slow down

and stopped at the light that was now green. A moment passed and Joanne said, “*What* are you doing?” Oops. I was not paying attention.

Following Jesus means paying attention, but not just with red lights. I mean paying attention to the needs around us. Following Jesus is about looking the world in the eye and seeing what is needed. I confess to you, this can be overwhelming. Statistics of world hunger, violence in our cities, and corporate layoffs can nearly shut us down. Mentally and emotionally we fall into the pattern of not making eye contact and focus straight ahead on our own path, lest we get diverted into someone else’s troubles.

Jesus did not say, follow your own path for your own sake, and your own well-being, and your own security. Jesus said, “Follow me.” That means that it will take us to the heart of the needs around us. We cannot get there if we are not paying attention. A healthy church is an attentive church to what is going on in the community and region.

Scott Walker writes: “As simple as this sounds, the decision to *stop* and help a person is the heart of Christian discipleship.” (*Footsteps of the Fisherman*, p. 117) Everyday people are along our path in need. Yes, it may be someone asking for a handout: bus fare, or a meal, or some gasoline. There are other needs too. People line our path that just need a listening ear. A child is a behavioral problem and is struggling in school and needs someone to hear their problems at school and at home. A marriage is going through a rough patch and needs the support of listening ears who hear with empathy and not judgment. A man is struggling with addiction issues and is asking for a way out but cannot get past the shame. A grandmother’s troubling diagnosis needs not only physical healing but spiritual assurance. They may not have their hand out, but they might as well be shaking a cup.

Following Jesus means paying attention and stopping long enough for Christ to be incarnated. There is, however, more to this story than just paying attention and stopping.

Verse six is the heart of this story. Peter says that he has no silver or gold. I wonder if Peter diverted his eyes for just a moment from the beggar and glanced at the grand doors of the temple. Those doors did not have silver or gold either. They were not gilded at all, but were made of heavy Corinthian bronze. Josephus mentions that this bronze gate exceeded the value of gilded gold and silver. John Polhill writes in his commentary: “Some things are more precious than silver or gold. The beggar was soon to learn this lesson of the ‘Beautiful’ gate (*The New American Commentary*, p. 127).

Following Jesus means paying attention and...

### **Following Jesus Means Helping and Healing**

In the name of Jesus, we are told, the man is healed and walks. He asked for a hand out and received something better. Not only are we told he is healed of his physical ailment, he now has found acceptance. You see, as a lame man he was not permitted to enter the temple for worship but remained outside the gates with the Gentiles. According to the sacrificial system, being lame was the equivalent of a blemished offering, which was unacceptable.

Throughout Acts, we read of God “gate-crashing,” on behalf of those who have been crippled by life and shut out. In the name of Jesus, we will read that those who have been deemed unworthy find a place, “whether a lame beggar, an Ethiopian eunuch, a woman or a Gentile. (Polhill, p. 128)

Here is where I get frustrated. I am grateful that Jesus and now the apostle Peter can reach out their hand and restore a life. This has never happened to me. I cannot begin to tell you how many times I have walked

down corridors of hospitals, wishing that I could dart in each room and drive out the cancers, cleanse the mentally ill, and dry up the alcoholics. This has never happened to me.

What is healing anyway? As I think about this some more, the truth is, even Jesus did not attempt to eradicate all disease everywhere. There were still lepers after Jesus ascended into heaven. There were lame left behind and illnesses and suffering still going on, just as before, when he walked the earth. What we do know is that Jesus cared for all those who were in his path. There was the tax collector, named Zacchaeus, who apparently was a swindler, but Jesus saw past that and ate in his home. There was the Canaanite woman, who did not even belong to the same religion of Jesus, but Jesus saw right past their differences. The stories are many.

Following Jesus, means that we have a healing ministry too. And this healing comes by taking the time for caring for those who find their way in our path.

The late Henri Nouwen, whom I have long respected, once wrote of an address he gave to a gathering of students at Yale University. He wrote that many of these students were the brightest and best, who would be the next generation of doctors, scientists, ministers, and leaders. All their potential and accomplishments would be meaningless, if their hearts were not moved to respond to the needs right in front of them:

Why is it that we keep the great gift of care so deeply hidden? Why is it that we keep giving dimes without daring to look into the face of the beggar? Why is it that we do not join the lonely eater in the dining hall but look for those whom we know so well? Why is it that we so seldom knock on a door or grab a phone, just to say hello, just to show that we have been thinking about each other? Why are smiles still hard to get and words of comfort so difficult to come by? Why is it so hard to express thanks to a teacher, admiration to a student, and appreciation to the men and women who cook, clean, and garden? Why do we keep bypassing each other always on the way to something or someone more important? (*Out of Solitude*, p. 41)

Of course, you can stop and help, but not care. And that is not Christian discipleship. That is just trying to appease a guilty conscience. Don't worry, I am not preaching to you, I am preaching with you. I have my checklist of "to-do's" in ministry. I, too, find myself rushing through a hospital visiting the sick and quickly moving on to the next event. At the end of the day, I can say, "Look at all the good things I did today; how I stopped and took notice out of my busy, busy day." But, if I have not cared, did I really help? Was there any healing? This is what Paul had in mind when he wrote in his letter to the Corinthians, *that even if I had faith to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing* (1 Corinthians 13.2).

When the eyes of the beggar were downcast, as his hands were outstretched, Peter did not flip a coin and keep on walking to church. Peter said, "Look at us," and at once, his dignity was restored.

Let me hasten to add, however, that Peter did not heal the man. Healing is not possible on Peter's terms or in his power. Peter invoked the name of Jesus. Several times in the book of Acts, Jesus' name is invoked. Claiming something in the name of Jesus is not the same thing as using the name of Jesus. What Peter was doing was claiming God to be present in this person's life.

And maybe that is just the point. In the name of Jesus, not every disease will be eradicated or every belly filled or every act of suffering relieved. But, in the name of Jesus is claiming God to be present in the knitty-gritty dynamics of life. God is not cleaned up and detached behind temple walls, but is out there on the streets alongside the beggars, the lame, the drunks, the abusers and the abused.

We are compelled in our discipleship, in our response, to walk the way of Jesus, to do so in his name. We can do this by praying for another. We can do this by reminding a searching soul that God is willing to search with you. We can do this, but do we?

The apostle Peter had it right: *in the name of Jesus*. It is not a magic formula. It is claiming God in a situation.

In the name of Jesus, we remind one another that children are not just seen but they are also heard.

In the name of Jesus, we affirm all people, no matter skin color, no matter gender, no matter background.

In the name of Jesus, we envision a new reality and a new life.

In the name of Jesus, we can transform this world, if we pay attention, if we stop, if we love...