

Acts 3:1-10

About six years ago, Keith and I were looking for a new car that his mother could get in and out of with our assistance. We checked out a variety of makes and models, but nothing seemed to fit the bill. After what seemed like the hundredth test drive, I mentioned that I liked Mini Coopers. So Keith and I went to the dealer and I became a Mini driver for life.

One of the things I like about Minis is their distinct appearance. Mini's can be personalized by adding stripes and decals to their hood, roof and mirrors. Unlike my daughter's grey, Honda mini van...I've yet to see another Mini Cooper that looks exactly like mine.

I've never seen my car's double, but I have seen lots of Mini Coopers. It's kind of funny... before I leased a Mini, I don't remember seeing too many of them on the road. However, now that I drive one...I feel like I see them everywhere I go. I don't think this awareness is due to a surge in sales. Rather...it's because of our tendency to notice the things that are near and dear to our hearts.

Today's reading is about awareness. It encourages us to pay closer attention to the people we encounter, and to be curious about the way God is calling us to be conduits of His healing love in their lives.

Last week we heard how Jesus promised his disciples that they would receive power from the Holy Spirit and they would be his witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the ends of the earth. We're going to hear the story about how the Holy Spirit came to the disciples when we celebrate Pentecost on May 31st.

Today's reading contains one of the first "acts" the disciples performed after receiving the Holy Spirit. Luke tells us that as Peter and John were going up to the Temple to pray, they encountered a lame man who was begging for money by one of the Temple gates. It's important to note that the Law of Moses only allowed men who were ceremonially clean and fully intact enter the Temple for worship. Women, children, foreigners and people with physical disabilities had to stay outside and watch.

The lame man saw Peter and John walk by and called out to them for help. Luke used the Greek word, *eidon* to describe the lame man's observation. This tells us that to him, Peter and John were kind of like my daughter's mini van...just another source of loose change.

When Peter and John heard the man's request, they stopped and looked intently at him. Luke used a different word to describe their gaze. *Atenizo* is the Greek word from which we get our word, attention. This tells us that when Peter and John looked at the man, they had a Mini Cooper moment.

Peter and John saw people begging every time they went in and out of the Temple gates. But this time was different. This time...they stared at the man as if he were the first beggar they'd ever seen. That's one of the things the Holy Spirit does in the life of a believer. He heightens our awareness and empowers us to see people through the lens of faith. Listen to how Paul Banes describes this spiritual vision; "The resurrected Christ encourages us to focus on the presence of God in everything we do. It is the gift of seeing with spiritual eyes, the eternal perspective of the world and partaking of God's nature in it."

Peter and John may not have noticed this man on previous trips to the Temple, but this time...he has their full attention. Peter tells him, "Look at us." This may seem like a strange request. After all, the man must have seen them or he wouldn't have called out to them for help. Once again, Luke's choice of verbs helps us understand Peter's command. *Blepo* indicates a deeper, or spiritual insight. This tells us

that Peter didn't just want the lame man to notice them...he wanted the man to see the God that dwelt inside of them.

Peter and John didn't have any coins to drop into the lame man's hand. However, they did have something to give him. Peter and John wanted to share their relationship with the living Christ. So Peter said, "In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."

It may seem like the miracle occurred when the man stood up and walked. But the healing began when Peter reached out, took the man by the right hand and raised him to his feet. This particular detail is an important part of the story, because people in that culture used their right hands to greet friends and people from the same station in life. With this simple gesture, Peter crossed the barrier between cripples and able-bodied people and acknowledged the man as his equal.

Allow me to add one more word to our Greek vocabulary. Luke used the word, *egairo* to describe Peter's gesture. This word can be translated as resurrection. It tells us that Peter was demonstrating God's restorative power...the power that breathes new life into broken bodies and wounded souls.

Luke tells us that the man was so overjoyed that he entered the Temple with Peter and John, "walking and leaping and praising God."

This was the first time in his life that he was allowed to go through the Temple gate. When the people saw him, they were filled with wonder and awe.

Stories like this invite us to wonder about the role healing plays in our world...and I can't think of a better time to wonder about this. The Coronavirus has reminded us how susceptible we are to illness and death. The social isolation we've experienced over the past five weeks has shown us what it's like to be separated from people we love and cut-off from the activities in our community. This story invites us to ask...who is the Spirit calling us to be aware of in this unsettling time? What kind of gifts have we been given to share in Jesus' name?

At the beginning of this sermon I mentioned that this reading is about awareness. Their relationship with the Jesus Christ made Peter and John aware of the lame man. It empowered them to stop viewing him as just another object of their pity and start seeing him as a fellow human being. As a result, the lame man stopped viewing Peter and John as just another source of loose change and saw them as fellow human beings he was able to trust.

We are called to live out the same mission that Peter and John were called to live. We're called to see people the way God sees

them...as one of God's unique and beloved children. Through our words and actions, we get to bear witness to the resurrection hope that is found in Jesus Christ. And like Peter and John, we can trust that the Holy Spirit will use us as conduits of God's healing power as we extend our hand to them in love.

Who do you know that feels overlooked because of their circumstances? Who is cut-off from the people they love during this unsettling time? Take a moment to look intently at their situation. Ask the Spirit to help you see them through spiritual eyes. Then reach out to them with a phone call or note of encouragement so they can experience the healing power of God's resurrection hope through you. May the Spirit continue to grow you into deeper faith as you follow Jesus Christ.

Amen

