

The Third Sunday of Easter
April 30, 2017
Christ the Rock Ev Lutheran Church
Farmington, NM

Acts 3:11-20 While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. 12 When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? 13 The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. 14 You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. 15 You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. 16 By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. 17 "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. 18 But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. 19 Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, 20 and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus.

"Better Than a Bargain"

Movie to a new place takes adjusting. Making it feel like home doesn't happen over night. So many things are different. Finding common interests and shared values can go a long way to making that new place feel like home, making you feel like you belong.

Crazy weather that swerves from one extreme to another like a teenager in driver's ed doesn't make anyone feel like this is normal. But there is something about our area here in the Four Corners that makes me think I might belong. I had been alerted to a special deal going on at Jimmy John's sandwich shop. When I arrived, there was a line around the block. On the 31st of every month, Baskin Robbins is packed to the point I hope the fire marshal doesn't show up. We love bargains. We share this love. Announce a special promotion, and you can expect a crowd. Offer to give something away for free, and you should prepare for a stampede.

In Acts chapter three we get to witness an amazing offer. And when we really let the message from the Apostle Peter sink in, we see that what is held out for audiences everywhere is much better than a bargain.

Now I know we are skipping around in the Book of Acts from last week to this week. It will continue in the next few weeks. That's because we aren't marching chronologically through the events of Acts. We are focusing on the post-Easter appearances of Jesus and then seeing the impact of that resurrection reality. In the days after Easter, Jesus appears to give peace. Jesus explains everything that happened in recent days was done in fulfillment of his

mission. And then once he reveals what it all means, he gives the disciples the blessed responsibility of sharing that good news.

Acts chapter three is a great example of the results disciples get after Jesus appears. We aren't given all the background. We just see in the verses immediately before Acts 3:11-20 that Peter and John go up to the temple. This must have been a regular pattern of gathering together for instruction, prayer, and praise with other believers. This time was different though. On their way into the temple complex, they spot a man begging. This man had been unable to use his legs since the time he was born. He was reduced to relying on the generosity of worshipers coming to the temple. Instead of brushing the beggar aside or giving him enough to make themselves feel charitable, Peter delivers this bombshell: **"Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."** (Acts 3:6) This was more than the man had bargained for. Immediately he began to walk, then jump. No shakiness. No need to adjust over time with appropriate therapy. He couldn't stop using his restored legs and praising God for this amazing miracle beyond his wildest dreams.

You know that those promotions in stores and restaurants aren't accidents. New businesses might offer a free meal just to get you in the door. Sometimes they offer a steep discount knowing that most people will make another purchase which might cancel out the money lost on the promotion.

Healing the disabled man at the gate of the temple wasn't an accident either. There must have been some sort of temple service while the healed man refused to sit still. When it was over, the worshipers ran into Peter, John, and the man who had just been healed. Here's the scene: **"While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade."** (Acts 3:11) We don't know if the Holy Spirit revealed the game plan for this amazing miracle ahead of time or if Peter just realized what an opportunity was presenting itself for him to just jump on and capitalize on for the name of Jesus. He quickly addresses the crowd: **"Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"** (Acts 3:12) God had a bigger purpose in mind. God wanted to use this miracle, this amazing promotion to bring glory to Jesus: **"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus."** (Acts 3:13) Peter deflects attention away from himself. It wasn't by his raw power or a reward for his great godliness. All the glory belongs to the Risen Lord and Savior Jesus.

There is a real purpose behind getting the attention of crowds at the temple grounds. Peter shifts attention to Jesus so his audience can come to grips with the reality of what just happened to Jesus. It is just weeks after Jesus was greeted by crowds on Palm Sunday and jeered at on Good Friday. While those memories are still fresh, Peter elaborates on what happened: **"You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this."** (Acts 3:13-15) Peter opens up raw wounds to reveal who Jesus really is and what actually happened. Peter lets the full sting sink in.

This crowd denied the one who was spotless throughout his whole life and approved by God. Instead they demanded that a vicious murderer be released as a favor to them. He's not going to let them off the hook. A murderer who took lives was let go while the one who authors and creates life was killed mercilessly on the cross.

This is all a little more than those crowds had bargained for when they first came streaming to Peter. They witnessed the spectacle of the man born disabled praising God and wanted to get to the source of the commotion. But this isn't really what they had in mind.

There is a brutality to the message of Jesus that gives us more than we bargained for. The full impact of what happened to Jesus and what he went through makes us more than just a touch uncomfortable. It's more than we bargained for. Sometimes we just grab a bargain because it's a bargain. I once bought a souvenir in Mexico just because I got a great deal. I didn't need it. I didn't even want it. I just wanted to see how low the seller would go. My wife realizes this and so she's afraid of sending me to the store. She sends me out to get two or three things, but I come back with a shopping cart worth of bargains. They were on sale. The bargains were too good to pass up.

We adopt the bargain hunter mentality when we come to Jesus. We know he's special. We know he's got something to offer. But we are just here to get what we came for and leave. We don't want any kind of awkward sales pitch. We don't want to get sucked into something deeper. Jesus is showing off power and we would like to get connected. Disciples are sharing favors and we could use a little boost from Jesus. I could use an excuse to jump around and praise God. I could use that dose of healing for my struggles. We have this human tendency to treat power displays as simple spectacles. We think of ourselves as consumers. Our bargain-bin attempts at finding Jesus robs us of the real benefits Jesus wants to give us.

Peter has a purpose not just for the miracle. It's not bait and switch, but better than what they bargained for. The crowds coming to see the source of this healed man get more than they bargained for. Through that uncomfortable squirming that shows them their own guilt and responsibility for the wrongful execution of Jesus, Peter is able to point them to the solution. He simply instructs: **"Repent, then, and turn to God."** (Acts 3:19)

God had a purpose behind that miracle. It wasn't meant to be a sales pitch or a ploy to trick them into making some foolish investment. Behind that miracle was the power of Jesus. Behind their rejections and denial God was at work. God used that rejection to achieve his ultimate goal for all humanity. Just as he used the healing of this disabled man to reveal his glory through Peter. Jesus is at work: **"By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see."** (Acts 3:16) Jesus was behind this miracle. Faith in Jesus brings real power to real lives.

There are times when we wonder if an offer is really worth it. You have to make one regularly-priced purchased to get your free meal. You have to go online and fill out a survey to get your bonus gift. You have to mail in a rebate to get your money back. Based on

everything Jesus has done, the simple response is repentance. Jesus did in his lifetime everything that had been predicted by the prophets. So you and I need to repent of the shallow bargain-hunting approach to Jesus. We need to see him as more than a spectacle. His power went on display through the weakness of the cross. We need to reorient our lives so we see Jesus as someone who can do much more than just give me goodies for my life. Turning to Jesus we see his life and death and resurrection brings reconciliation with God.

The power in Jesus' name is more than we bargained for. Here's where we need to understand that simple phrase. The Name of Jesus isn't a magical formula that we tack onto our prayers and requests like some special code that gets us instant savings or special access. The Name of Jesus is God's way of revealing himself to us. Repentance in the Name of Jesus acknowledges the Messianic identity of Jesus and reorients life toward a reconciled relationship through the Messiah He sent.

The Name of Jesus shows us the blessings of the work Jesus accomplished as the Messiah sent by God. Through him, through repentance and turning to Jesus, your sins are wiped out. Everything on your record, everything God could use in judgment against you is forgotten so every trace of them is gone. Sins are completely obliterated. Through the Name of Jesus you have a season of refreshment from the Lord. That season of refreshment is like looking back on those vacation photos to remember one of the best times in your life. You can see the palm trees and feel the light breeze as you listen to the gentle crashing of waves on the beach. You get to enjoy the sweetness of God's grace to you in Christ. Recalling the Name of Jesus gives you just a taste, just a glimpse of eternal blessings that are waiting for you in heaven. And there is one last benefit of going God's way through repentance and turning. The Name of Jesus lets you know that God will send Messiah Jesus again. Jesus is going to make the ultimate return trip. And when he does, he's coming for you.

This is not really an offer you have to think about. There's not catch. No fine print. No downside at all. The citizens of Jerusalem were blessed to witness an amazing offer of power when Peter used a miraculous healing to point to the glory of God in Jesus Christ. Through that Name you get so much more than an amazing offer. Those displays of power are better than bargains. Trusting in Jesus gives you amazing spiritual blessings now and for all eternity. Amen.