



# Pastor Ken's Sermon

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SERMON – 3<sup>RD</sup> EASTER

ACTS 3:11-21.

APRIL 18, 2021

## “HOLDING ON FOR DEAR LIFE”

*“While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people...astonished...came running...*

Peter had himself a “teachable moment.” A man everyone full well knew was lame from birth was hopping about in plain sight, praising God. I don’t know about you, but my “teachable moments” in life have usually involved things like an open paint can left on the floor or a water hose turned on and left in the flower bed next to the house. You go inside to take a phone call, and next thing you know...! But Peter’s teachable moment gained him a hearing for the gospel, and he didn’t miss it. Well of course not...he was Peter, right? Religious heroes are supposed to succeed when given the chance – like clean up hitters are supposed to get walk off homeruns.

Peter had healed a lame beggar. And all the attention was focused on what happened to the beggar. Yet not two months earlier Peter had “begged off” three times when asked if he was a follower of Jesus. Who was the bigger miracle in this story I ask you? Jesus had made lame men walk all the time in his ministry, yet at the conclusion of it all it was Peter, at first glance a pretty lame Apostle, who God entrusted to stand up with the message of salvation!

Last week we spoke of how the resurrected Jesus through the Holy Spirit spoke “to” the first Christians, enabling them to demonstrate unprecedented, sacrificial love toward one another. *“All the believers were of one heart and mind...and shared everything they had.”* The first evidence of the resurrection in the church was these followers who loved one another as they believed they’d been loved by Jesus.

The second then was like it ... loving others into the kingdom of God. The movement of the gospel through the church in its infancy, as it must move now, is from the inside out – from the heart to the head, the head to the hands and feet, from “diakonia” within, people who love one another for the sake of Jesus, to a “diakonia without” – loving others for the sake of Jesus. In our lesson today, care now takes the form of preaching. Yes, Peter preaches a pretty raw edged sermon here, but he promised that repentance-standing up and facing your sins before turning to face your forgiver Jesus would bring a person *“times of refreshment.”*

“Diakonia” as we spoke of it last week is the refreshing of our bodies. Peter preaches, with a sharpened tongue – the message of salvation in Jesus Christ” called in Greek “the kerygma” meaning “proclamation.” Think of “diakonia” as what we are – people in love with Jesus and therefore each other, and kerygma as the reason we are. Today, I wish to consider from our lesson how we proclaim.

The first thing we learn from Peter's message is honesty – you might say startling honesty. Peter was pointedly truthful. But remember, this is Peter, who not so long ago was not so much God's "rock" as a fragile stone, and he full well knew that, like these same folks, a couple of months earlier he'd acted in ignorance too.

We all share and live our faith from a Peter perspective. The gospel of grace that saved you from your sins truly does authorize you to invite others into that same grace. We don't pry into people lives when we witness – because we don't have to. Our baptism liturgy tells all we need to know – *"we are born children of a fallen humanity."*

That's the truth. That's step one. You aren't speculating or being hypocritical to include that as part of any conversation about the faith you may have. The second step is this – know what the message of salvation in Jesus is. Peter tells us. Sin kills us spiritually, and once long ago that sin killed the author of life, Jesus. But God raised him from the dead. The late Catholic priest and writer Henri Nouwen said *"Jesus didn't rise from the dead to prove to those who had crucified him that they had made a mistake or confound his opponents. Nor did he rise to impress the rulers of his time or to force anyone to believe. Jesus' resurrection was the full affirmation of his Father's love."*

This was an act, Nouwen wrote, of *"unspectacular importance"* – very few people saw it. But think of how it has changed you, just as it changed Peter. That's all you need to "know" to do as Peter did – share the gospel. Peter got a "teachable moment" thanks to a healing – and there is no telling what might put one in front of you. I'm not backtracking on our Lutheran belief that the Spirit gives faith - this preacher will never claim my words are much good if they don't go into hearts the Spirit is first whispering too.

But you are the voice of the Spirit of God just as you are members of his "diakonia" – his beloved community. The Holy Spirit speaks through the gospel, but the gospel must be spoken. It doesn't float in the air, whispering to the occasional passerby *"hey, don't you think it's time to believe in me."* It's not a disembodied voice like the one that famously spoke to actor Kevin Costner in "Field of Dreams" *"... if you build it, they will come."* Peter told the truth – out loud, both the hard and the freeing. He told his inquiring listeners what he knew – that's what witnessing is.

I want to end today in a different manner than I usually do. I want to ask you, what would you say if you were asked why you still do what increasing numbers of people in our culture do not – worship in a church? Why do you confess your sins to God each week? If asked "what is sin anyway", what would you say? How does God forgive sins and why? Who is Jesus, and why does the bible say a person must know him by faith? Think of these things please. You are the members of God's beloved community, and if you know someone who does not know how to or even why a person must answer these questions, ask the Holy Spirit that spoke through Peter to speak through you. AMEN