

Easter 3, April 19, 2015

A Lesson from the Leaping Man

Acts 3:11–21



Dear Friends in Christ,

Have you heard the statement “you name it, you have it”? Some say that “you just have to name it and in faith you will have or receive it.” It has become the hope of many. No in some cases it has happened, people have named it and they received it. But others didn’t receive what they named, but because they didn’t receive it, some have walked away from their faith in disbelief, disappointment and rejection, and yet we hear others saying that maybe he or she didn’t get what they claimed it because he or she didn’t have enough hope or faith.

Yet some agree with miracles, others don’t but do have faith. And more sometimes there is a confusion regarding miracles and faith.

There has to be a different way of seeing faith and miracles. Therefore being “careful of what you hope for” is a lesson we need to learn: that we don’t get our hopes up when hope is not warranted, because it can be detrimental to our faith and even our health.

We must seek first God’s will and in His will bring and elevate our wishes. That you would claim God’s power and purpose for your life but according to His will. That we would not be afraid of seeing God’s power, after all He has claimed us as His children. That we would not hinder his will!

Our text of meditation this morning which is from the book of Acts 3:11–21, helps us to see this point. The text talks about a lame man who was healed. The first verses of chapter 3, tell us that this man was found begging at what was called the Beautiful Gate of the temple in Jerusalem, just as he’d done day after day. As two men approached, he lowered his eyes and raised up his beggar’s hands as he had always done, hoping for some coins. But Christ’s apostles gave him much more than he’d ever hoped for. Peter and John had no silver or gold to give, but what they had they gave graciously as proper servants of a mighty, gracious God. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” (3:6). The Word of God went out in power and something happened, the lame man got up.

Now, isn’t that what the prophet Isaiah said it will happen, he said: “Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees. Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.” Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped; then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy. (Is 35:3–6b)

Now, Isaiah’s leaping, bounding overstatement seems dangerous, doesn’t it? Liable to lift our hopes too high. His language is so picturesque, so vivid and concrete! But we seasoned men and women of the world know better than that. We know that if this Word is to speak soberly to us, we must rein in and restrain this image of a leaping lame man as soon as we hear of him, right? “The lame man leaps like a deer,” the prophet says. “This means gladness of heart,” we know. And that’s what we do, we

take Isaiah's prophecy as in a picture depicting the gladness of our salvation, and that is true, but when we see what is happening here in the book of Acts, we see that Isaiah was pointing perhaps to this scene in particular, where we see this lame man now jumping of joy for he is not lame any more. What Isaiah prophesized is not just a picture language but something real.

The apostles speak God's word, "claim it" "in the name of Christ" they say. As soon they said it, the Word of God went out in power; the lame man got up. Now, notice what the lame man does: he does not just get up the way we sometimes drag ourselves out of bed in the morning. He leaps to his feet. And he doesn't stop leaping. He leaps and shouts for joy into the very inner courts. The text says, "And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God" (3:8). In the place of the presence of God, he is literally leaping.

Now some also say that this miracle happened in the Apostles time, only, because it was to confirm the authority of the Apostles. And that in our days miracles are nonexistent. But God's power was, is and will be forever; therefore we shouldn't disbelieve what God can do even in our days.

As the crowd at the temple that day did. It should be no surprise that a crowd gathered round after evening prayer. They gathered, strangely enough, in the very same portico of Solomon where not long before the Jews had asked Jesus, "How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly" (Jn 10:24). This time, the crowds have gathered around the Christ's apostles and around this familiar-faced leaper, and their jaws are on the ground.

They want to know how this has happened. And then comes the bad news. This happened through the powerful name of Jesus, who recently came and preached to them, who fulfilled the Scriptures, and whom they had recently killed. This lame man stands before them as a living accusation. Peter puts it this way: You killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. (vv 15–16)

That was an unexpected and heavy word for crowds who had gathered together to marvel at a magic trick.

What you may or may not know is that the lame man also stands as a living, breathing accusation against us too. That we approach the promises of Scriptures the way we might approach the promises of a desperate politician behind in the polls: way too small.

The fact is we are prone to take Isaiah with a grain of salt. We allegorize away what seems too good to be true. We diminish the great promises Christ has won for us by his cross and empty tomb.

The apostle Paul opens his Epistle to the Romans by declaring that he is not ashamed of the Gospel (Rom 1:16), though it speaks of bodily resurrection of the dead and the restoration of the whole created order. A big hope indeed! Paul's hope was literal and large, and he wasn't ashamed about it. Why? Because Paul had already seen a dead man, Christ, resurrected.

Paul was not ashamed to hold out for a big hope, but we often are. Perhaps this is because we live in an age that has purported to draw a thick line between what is

possible and what is not. What does not fit in a test tube or show up in a telescope or submit to repeatable experiment is on the wrong side of the line when it comes to hope. “You will only be disappointed.” This is what we are told. And how quickly we agree: “Fine. Isaiah’s leaping man is just a joyful heart.” Christ’s words to the Sadducees who do not believe in resurrection are aptly applied now to us, the very people for whom he died and rose: “You are wrong,” Christ says, “because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God” (Mt 22:29).

When an almighty God is in the equation, a fine line between what is ultimately possible and what is not just ceases to make rational sense. How easy it’s been to forget that this world of airplanes and plasma screens and vague notions of progress has already seen a resurrection. We do well to remember that gloriously rising from the dead was deemed just as impossible in the larger Greek and Roman world of Peter and Paul’s day as it is in our own, but the apostles knew it had happened.

So here they proclaim the Good News, and here is the lame man, literally leaping before them, and here it serves as an indictment of those who handed over Christ to be killed, but just as much an indictment of those who hand over, who reject the hope Christ died and rose to win. Thanks be to God, then, that that’s not all the leaping man means.

Peter goes on to announce to the temple crowds that despite the ultimate sin—the ultimate rejection of the things of God, killing the Savior—Israel is not without her Messiah. Christ has been raised! The leaping man is not merely a sign that the people killed Christ. He is also a powerful declaration that Christ has been raised in power and is graciously pouring forth firstfruits of creation restoration to every beggarly hand turned his way—even the hands of those who killed him. “Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord” (vv 19–20a).

And, thanks be to God, the leaping man also points to God’s Gospel for us. The leaping man is a powerful testimony to the fact that big, biblical hope is both warranted and offered freely to every beggarly hand turned Christ’s way—even the hands that once refused it. The leaping man is literally leaping because Christ has literally been raised from the dead and is literally in the business of restoring all things. Best of all, the Messiah whom, Peter reminds us, “heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago” (v 21) is the same Messiah who bore our tragic refusal to love, trust, and obey God above all things. And that refusal, at bottom, is what our hope problem really comes down to.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, not only is a big, bodily, biblical hope warranted, but it is also still for you. Here we were, walking into the sanctuary this morning as spiritual beggars, ready to receive some paltry words of worldly wisdom or maybe a few nuggets about how to be nice and about heaven when we die. And God’s Word has poured out a hope that is bigger and better than anything we can imagine, for eternity and for now—a hope pressed down, shaken together, running over, and being graciously poured into our laps! That hope needs to be proclaimed and received, received and proclaimed. But only when and in accordance to God’s will.

Not only will the lame man’s heart rejoice, but also his legs will leap. Not only are our dead in Christ not gone, but they also (with us) are awaiting reunion and a glorious, physical embrace at the resurrection. Not only was the world once created good, but it

also eagerly waits with us for the restoration of all things (v 21; Rom 8:18–25). And that recreation can happen both here as in a glimpse of what the resurrection will be, in the way of a miracle or an illness cured! Now, one the biggest problem in our world when it comes to “claim it, receive it” is because most of the time we don’t claim God’s will but our own desires and interests, for example we do want the miracle because we want to be healed, or prolong death as much as we can. We make to be all about us, but doing so just goes against God’s will. The Hope of the Christian is in that God’s is doing things new, either here on earth or fully in heaven. Restoration, healing, life, will take place, here on earth or fully in heaven!

Therefore, you of little hope, lift up your eyes! Behold your gracious and glorious Lord, alive! And remember the lesson of the leaping man: There is something worse than risking hopes set too high: living our lives without hoping in Christ nearly enough!

Praise be to God, who both offers and secures more for us than we can imagine!
Amen.