

April 30, 2017

Just As He Told You (When in Doubt, Read the Instructions)

“Touch, Heal”

Mark 6:53-56

Acts 3:1-10

The Rev. Lynn P. Lampman

Today, is our third installment in “Just As Jesus Told You (When in Doubt, Read the Instructions).” To date, we have received the instructions “Go, Tell”, “Stay, Witness, and now this morning’s “Touch, Heal”.

Sometimes our bodies give us clues to what we need to learn. And in these two passages for this morning, our bodies become the clue on what we need to do. All of us have been given two hands connected to two arms for the purpose of reaching and grasping.

In our text for this morning we see the two hands and two arms at work, doing simply that. Our first reading was about the woman who reached out to Jesus, so as to grasp the hem of his garment. She and everyone else who touchéd him was healed. That is part one of the two-part maneuver we all need to do.

Our second reading for this morning, offers us the second part. Peter reaches out to help a man and in grasping his hand, the lame man is raised up. Then, he enters the Temple. Now this is a point not to be missed.

This man had been sitting at the “Beautiful Gate” all his life. That was as close as he got to the Temple, the closest he got to God. He was always restricted to the outside, never permitted on the

inside. That was until Peter's grasping hand made it possible. In the offering of healing, he changed other's perception of him.

It seems ironic doesn't it, that a gate called *beautiful* performed the ugly task of preventing those with the greatest needs from accessing the place that "housed God." The beautiful gate was the grand entrance to the Court of Women, the general place of public worship during the time of sacrifices.

Let's look at exactly what happened between the lame man and Peter. To begin with, the man expected something from him. - money to be specific! For all the money one had was considered loaned by God, and that giving to the poor was an expectation for people of faith in Jesus day.

The man begged with that expectation in mind. Yet, Peter had no money. He knew it was the set time to pray in the Temple, and the "beggars" were always there, so why didn't he carry money with him and give. Did he not have it? Or did he have something else in mind. Maybe something even better!

Consistory as you know has been working on developing a strategic plan for St. James with the next three to five years in mind. We are taking an honest look where we are as a church, and seeking the face and voice of God, and the wisdom our community to see where God wants us to go.

Let me do a little confession here. On a bad day, I say what can we do in the future; we don't have a lot of money. Yet, I realized recently that this doesn't let me, or the church off the hook, because like Peter we have other forms of currency.

Let's just look at how rich we really are:

1. We have the currency of relationship. Listening, be present, and developing a truly caring friendship takes no money at all. The church for so long has worried about giving food to the hungry and the homeless, that we at times have forgotten to give what folks like the person at the “Ugly Gate” needed most. Someone to notice, listen, and care.

I think it is interesting what Peter and John said to the man, “Look at us.” And, then they looked at him. He was not just a petitioning voice, he was a man who sat there daily, lame since birth, who needed more than a hand up. Rather, he needed community, and that is what Peter offered him in Jesus name. This first miracle of the disciples since Jesus went away into heaven is nothing less than a glimpse into the new reality of the new kingdom of God ushered in by the Resurrected Jesus.

2. In addition, Peter and John dealt out to the man the currency of time and place. He went from outside the temple, to inside the temple. They opened up his future for him, a future that would allow him to always and forever have access to God and belonging. Because the kingdom had come on earth as it was in heaven. So, the once lame man who expected only some chump change received eternal acceptance and companionship, and heaven on earth.
3. Next, they gave him the currency of truth. The religious institutions of their day, were deluding themselves thinking all they were doing was pleasing to God. Yet, Peter and John refused to accept things as they had always been, things needed to change because of the life, death and

resurrection of Jesus. So, they declared to the lame man and all those like him, that they a rightful place in God's house and an important place in God's plan. Exterior familiarity was to be no more, rather they were to be in the innermost courts of God's kingdom! Part of God's plan for the church is to hold events and do activities that tell and declare God's truth. We are to do, not merely the work of charity and mercy, but also the work of justice and equality.

4. Peter and John through the power of Jesus, also used the currency of wellness. They not only healed this man and thus restored him to well-being. They also, restored the community to wellness. When we put those different from ourselves, those we keep at arm's length because we fear who they are, what they have, who they are not, and what they are not we become ill as a community. By incorporating all of the community we do not become weaker, we become stronger, healthier, and well.

5. And last but not least, Peter and John gave the currency of gracious leadership. They decided to love first, not judge first, and that the last, shall be first. Their gracious leadership showed others how to handle the power they have been given. They did not hold their power over others; they empowered others to stand up, rise, and move forward. Gracious leaders know how to use their privileges and power, not for their own gain but for the purpose of moving the Cycle of Blessing forward. Only in a circle can the first be last, and the last be first. Gracious leaders do not focus on self-interest, but on community well-being.

Last, let me end with a contemporary example of our r reading for today. It is my hope and prayer that we will realize that we too can bring healing to folks by utilizing our riches – our currencies of: relationship, truth, time and place, wellness, and gracious leadership – just as Peter and John did.

Video trailer for “Gen Silence”

<https://openandaffirming.org/issues/seniors/>