

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod
Third Sunday of Easter
April 14, 2024
Sermon by Pastor Gary A. Pufahl
We courageously share a powerful message.

While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people came running toward them in utter amazement in the area called Solomon's Colonnade.

¹²When Peter saw this, he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us, as if by our own power or godliness we have made this man walk?" ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you. ¹⁵You killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶And on the basis of faith in his name, it is the name of Jesus that has strengthened this man, whom you see and know. This faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.

¹⁷"Now brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, just like your leaders. ¹⁸But in this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through the mouth of all the prophets: that his Christ would suffer. ¹⁹Therefore repent and return to have your sins wiped out, ²⁰so that refreshing times may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you.

—Acts 3:11-20

Sometimes you and I experience things that only happen once in a lifetime. Take, for example, September 11, 2001. Chances are good that if you are over 30 years old, you remember where you were and what you were doing when you heard the news. I was getting things ready for our Tuesday morning Bible class at my vicar congregation at Immanuel Lutheran Church in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. I will never forget people arriving at the Bible study and saying, "Did you hear what happened?" We couldn't believe the sight we saw on the television of a hole in the side of the World Trade Center. It was one of those events that is forever etched in my mind.

I suppose that was probably what happened to many people in the context of our words for today. A man was crippled from birth. He was over 40 years old. He had been begging at the temple gates for years. All the people knew who he was. And then one day they see that he was healed and he could walk. And not just walk, he was running and jumping. He was fully healed. He didn't have to go through physical therapy. No. He was jumping and running around. It was one of those moments the people would never forget. It was a miracle.

Well, people began to wonder. They were in awe of Peter and John. They stared at them with amazement. They wondered if it was by their own power or godliness that they made this man walk. Peter had a captive audience. The people wanted to know what was going on. So, what does he say? Did he say, "Ah, it was nothing. It's all in a day's work. When you believe like me, well, then things like this happen."

No. Not at all! Instead he said, "**The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and disowned in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him.**" ¹⁴**You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you.** ¹⁵**You killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead. We are witnesses of this.** ¹⁶**And on the basis of faith in his name, it is the name of Jesus that has strengthened this man, whom you see and know. This faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you."**

First of all, Peter would not allow the focus to be on Peter. Instead, notice that Peter gave a clear testimony as to who the power source was behind the miracle. It was Jesus. With great detail, Peter said that Jesus was raised from the dead and glorified by "**the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.**" He was the "**Holy and Righteous One**" and the "**Author of Life.**" Peter was essentially saying, "Do you want to know who did this? It was Jesus! He's not dead. He's alive. This is *resurrection reality*. He is now alive and right now he is in glory in heaven! That's who did this amazing miracle!" Instead of pointing people to himself, Peter pointed them to Christ.

Every so often opportunities like this come to you and me. Not that Jesus has ever used us to cause a crippled man to walk, but we do get those opportunities where people look up to us and are willing to hear what we have to say. Right?

As parents or grandparents you might get those questions quite a bit from the young children. "Why do we have a solar eclipse? Where did it come from?"

Or maybe the opportunity comes to you from a patient you are serving in the hospital. That patient has become very appreciative of your help and asks, "Do you believe in life after death?"

Or maybe it's with a co-worker who's going through a rough time in life and has noticed how you are always so nice and friendly. They come to you in amazement and say, "What is it that makes you different from so many people?"

You see, every so often, people will put down their blinders and honestly ask you for answers. And that is the opportunity where *we courageously share a powerful message*.

That's what Peter did. He *courageously shared a powerful message*. But notice *how* Peter presented Jesus. If you really examine what Peter was saying, I have to imagine it was quite terrifying for the Jews standing there. Peter didn't just tell them about Christ. He told them what *they* did to Christ. **"You handed [him] over. You disowned [him] in the presence of Pilate. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you. You killed the Author of Life, whom God raised from the dead."**

Peter was very *courageous in his powerful message of rebuke*. He was very direct, and he told them that they killed, not just another man, but **"the Author of Life."** And that one they killed is now alive, and he has power; power to cause this man to walk.

Just think about the terror of that message. "This man we killed is alive and is now powerfully ruling the universe." This is worse than the puny little kid who was picked on in grade school growing up and later in life becomes the bully's boss. The people must have thought, "What am I going to do? Where am I going to run? I doomed." Peter *courageously shared a powerful message* and made these Jews see that they could not just disassociate themselves from this miraculous healing of the crippled man. They needed to see their relationship with the one who truly had the power to do this miracle.

Do you have that kind of courage? Boy, I tell you I wish I had it more often. I wish I could apply this to the way I talk to people. It's easy to talk about "sin" and "grace," but it's terrifying to apply it so personally to people. It's easy to say to people, "We're all sinners," but it's terrifying to actually say to someone, "You are disowning Christ through your lack of church attendance." It's terrifying to say to someone who is living together outside of marriage, "You have rejected Christ by having this adulterous affair."

Oh, we have friends and neighbors and even our own children who know they're sinners. They have even admitted it as such. But do they ever stop and think to themselves, "I am disowning Christ by what I'm doing." And maybe we know specifically what and how they are disowning Christ, but do we get the courage to call them on it?

When that person in your life loses a job or experiences something in life that makes them stop and ask for answers, you need to share with them a powerful message. "You can't just keep on working and accumulating possessions and living like there is no Author of Life." When that couple is living a promiscuous lifestyle, you need to share with them a powerful message. "You can't continue to live together outside of marriage and think you'll get away with it."

My friends, it's important for us to do this. We need to *courageously share a powerful message of God's law*. His law needs to cut to the heart of people. But there is a reason and purpose for doing that.

What was Peter's purpose in doing this? Peter lays it out very clearly in his last plea with the people. **"Therefore repent and return to have your sins wiped out, so that refreshing times may come from the presence of the Lord and that he may send Jesus, the Christ appointed for you."** The only way you can fill a jar is if it is empty first, right? That's what Peter was doing. He was helping these Jews see that they needed Jesus. As long as these Jews were full of excuses or self-righteousness, they would see no need for Christ. But if they could be brought to their knees, if they could realize that they needed God's grace and mercy, then their **"sins would be wiped out, [and] refreshing times [would] come."**

That's why we *courageously share a powerful message of God's law*. We want to direct people to the powerful message of *God's gospel*. And you notice how Peter does that. Peter said that this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ would suffer. Even though they had done a terrible thing by disowning and crucifying Jesus, God used their treachery to save the world through the suffering of Christ, their substitute! God *used* their evil to *pay for* their evil. He turned what they did into something wonderful for them and for the world. It was God's gracious plan. So even though they had done something terrible, they didn't need to be afraid.

Confess your sins and turn to Christ. The resurrected and living Lord has his arms open for you. You too can have the comfort of forgiveness through the blood of Christ. Peter *courageously shared a powerful message of hope*.

And that's what our friends and neighbors need us to do as well. The goal is to *courageously share a powerful message of hope*. Right? After that person has been cut to the heart, you courageously say, "If you realize what you are doing and turn to God instead, trusting in Christ for your forgiveness, refreshing times will come."

Refreshing times. It's actually a really neat picture that Peter uses when he says those words: refreshing times. The basic sense of the word is "to cool or refresh with a breath" or "to dry out." Think about a wound. In medicine, treating a wound with fresh air is what "refreshing" means.

Oh, it's difficult to take the bandages of excuses off our sins. You pull back those bandages, and what do you see? It reveals how ugly our lives really are. But once you expose your wounds and sinful scars to God, then the cool air of God's forgiveness and blood will begin the healing.

When people ask us for answers, they need to know there still is hope and forgiveness in the death and resurrection of Christ. It may take some time, but those long felt scars of guilt and shame will eventually heal over. By taking your guilt to the cross, you'll experience a new life of love, forgiveness, and hope through the blood of Christ. And there is nothing greater than having your deep wounds of sin healed by the salve of Christ's refreshing forgiveness.

So, I would encourage you to think about someone in your life right now. Maybe it's your neighbor. Maybe your child or grandchild. But think about someone in your life who is trapped in their sin right now. What are you willing to do for that person? I encourage you today. *Courageously share a powerful message. Share a powerful message that cuts to the heart.* And then *share a powerful message that heals the soul.* God is with you as you courageously do that. Amen.