

SERMON, 17 APRIL 2021 – ACTS 3.12-19, LUKE 24.36b-48

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.



The world doesn't change very much. Two thousand years ago the beggar had his place, and the best place to beg was by the temple gate – please help, please make a donation. And presumably most people did what we do, hurry past, trying not to make eye contact, feeling angry that they have to beg, and having all sorts of reasons why we can't help.

Peter and John say they haven't got silver and gold, but “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” They take his hand, haul him up, his legs and ankles are healed, and he enters the “temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.”



Jesus was a healer. In the gospels we're told his disciples were healers too. So what makes this healing special? It is so public, in the holiest place of Judaism – and it is done in the name of Jesus Christ, the man who for three years had drawn the crowds for healings like this. It is done in the name of Jesus Christ whom just a few weeks before, had entered the city with crowds shouting Hosanna, who had entered the temple and caused trouble. It is done in the name of Jesus who had been crucified on the orders of the leaders of that Temple. It is done in the name of Jesus, who rumour had it was alive, and whose followers were proclaiming they were alive with the very Spirit of God – followers who were not going to shut up and go away.

Peter has an audience, and he speaks. Whether these were his actual words which someone wrote down that evening, preserved for several decades until

Luke sat down and wrote Acts – or whether this is what Luke felt he would have said, who knows? But it is powerful stuff.



A man has been healed. I don't know how, and I struggle with it. Part of me struggles because I have a wife for whom life would be very different if this Peter had power to hold her by the hand and tell her "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." Over the years a few people have told her that if she truly believed she would be healed – well, she does believe, and she isn't healed, and sometimes that hurts. Hurts her, and hurts me – so when my frustration, with her, with her disability, with Society's inability to cope, with our Church's inability to cope - when my frustration with it all boils over, please understand.



A man has been healed, and Peter uses it as an opportunity to tell the people about Jesus. Firstly, he directs the crowd away from himself, away from his fellow disciples – we haven't done this by "our own power or piety". It's not us, it's him. We are believers in Jesus Christ, we are disciples of Jesus Christ – to Him be the praise and the glory. We have got to get better at directing the gaze to Christ.

Peter is convinced that Jesus stands in the tradition of his ancestors, in the tradition of faith in which he was bought up. We saw that yesterday – faith

standing in the tradition of our ancestors. Our Society, our Church, needs to rediscover that – that is a huge part of our task.



Julie and I were at Belton House on Friday, lovely National Trust property near Grantham. Lots and lots of children all doing the National Trust's Easter Trail – but the parish church, next to the estate, is closed off. They won't find the true meaning of Easter while the church is shut. On the other hand, did you see that Canterbury Cathedral's Easter service this year was watched by 1.3 million people – that's the power of technology. We need to mix the old and the new.

Peter tells the crowd they were wrong, they were ignorant – they rejected God's "Holy and Righteous One". He focusses on their sin – calls for their repentance. We have all fallen short of the God's standards, and all of us have to cope with our sin and the sin of this world. I believe that God's love, and only God's love, gives us the power to move forward.

I want to proclaim faith, and love, and forgiveness – and I want us to proclaim that faith and love and forgiveness to all. To those who come to worship, to those who come for baptism, to those who come for marriage, to those who come in illness and death, to those who come because of a school, to those who come because this is a beautiful historic place. I want to proclaim faith, and love, and forgiveness – I want us to proclaim the fullness of life in Jesus Christ.



You see from the Noticesheet that I am marrying Jeff and Pauline on Wednesday at Abbeydale. Jeff is seriously ill, end-of-life. They've been together for 15 years, but never got round to getting married – and then Jeff asked Pauline, she said “yes”, and I got an email from the staff to say “how do we do this?” BBC Radio Derby have picked up on the story and there is lovely short video, with a link from the church website. Please watch it, and hold us all in your prayers. When I went to see Pauline they had a sign by their front door – “This is a little house with a big welcome.” So often I go to houses where they have a notice telling me all the reasons why we are not wanted, why we shouldn't knock, notices that basically tell us to go away. If I want a definition of “the fullness of life in Jesus Christ”, of what it means to be a Christian, then you can quote the sign on the house of a Christian couple: “This is a little house with a big welcome.” May God bless them on their marriage, and bless us all.