

A Community of Unstoppable Faith

Acts 3:1-16

Introduction

I recently heard a story about a farmer from one of the remote counties in southeast Ohio who was chosen by his local agricultural board to be their delegate at the state agricultural convention in Columbus. The farmer had never been out of the county before, so he was very excited to be selected. He wanted his family to be able to see the big city too, so he took them with him.

When they checked into their hotel, they were in awe of the impressive sights that surrounded them: fountains spraying water, marble floors, polished brass everywhere. The farmer's wife wanted to go explore the other sights in the lobby, but the farmer couldn't take his eyes off the elaborately ornate elevator. He had never seen such a thing before. He just stared at it, trying to figure out what that little room might be for.

As he watched, he noticed an older woman hobble to the door. She stepped inside, and the door closed. About a minute later, the door opened, and out walked this stunningly beautiful young woman.

He couldn't believe what he had just witnessed. Without taking his eyes off the elevator, he patted the head of his young son who was still at his side, and said, "Boy, go get your mother."

As dramatic as the elevator transformation was for that farmer, the day of Pentecost was had an even more dramatic transformation on the disciples of Jesus Christ. For example, in our text today we see Peter boldly confront the Jewish people, accusing them in no uncertain terms of conspiring to murder Jesus. This is the same Peter who ...

- Had cowered in fear with a teenaged girl asked him if he knew who Jesus was
- Boasted that he could walk on the water just as Jesus was doing, only to sink like a rock when his feet got wet.

Each of the disciples had undergone such a transformation. Where once they could be found hiding behind locked doors, now they were openly preaching about the resurrection of Jesus and the need for genuine repentance. The transformation in their lives was all due to the events of Pentecost.

You and I, here in 2021, are living in anticipation of Pentecost. On our calendars, Easter was two weeks ago (April 4), and Pentecost is still five weeks away (May 23). But in our text – and in most of the book of Acts – Pentecost was a past event. It happens in chapter two. We are in chapter three. So in today's text, Peter and John are living in the aftermath of Pentecost.

Prior to Pentecost, the disciples had been merely followers of Jesus, totally loyal to Him but also fully dependent on Him for every spiritual matter. They thought and acted like

Jews that they were, in keeping with their heritage. They didn't yet know how to think with the Kingdom mindset of Jesus.

- They followed Jesus, but followed Him with a mixture of doubt, fear and faith.
 - They could be bold and profound in one moment ("You are the Christ!") and filled with fear at the circumstances around them in the next (Wake up Jesus! We are about to drown.)
- They had witnessed Christ's death and resurrection, but still hid in secret places for fear of the Jewish leaders.

But then Pentecost came. On that day the rushing wind of the Holy Spirit swooped down on them and filled them with all they would need to be the church that Jesus had called them to be.

- All the pieces of the puzzle that had been scattered throughout their minds, now fit into place, all the teachings, all the miracles, all the troubling statements. It all made sense now.
- They saw the connections between the Old Testament prophecies they had been taught as children and the life of Jesus they had experienced with Him.
- They had come alive! They now confidently knew that it was all true.

Their "little" faith had exploded into something far greater than they had known before.

- They now believed in what Christ had done **for** them
- But more than that, they now believed that Christ would work **through** them.

They remembered what Jesus had told them on the night of Last Supper:

Very truly I tell you, whoever believes in me will do the works I have been doing, and they will do even greater things than these ... (John 14:12)

Their little faith had now been transformed into a powerful faith that believed nothing was impossible. To use the words of this sermon series, they now possessed an ...

UNSTOPPABLE FAITH

In this series of sermons we are looking these disciples became the UNSTOPPABLE CHURCH Jesus came to build:

On this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hell will not overcome it. (Matthew 16:18)

Last week we have proclaimed that the church is the greatest force on earth. That the Holy Spirit is unleashed through the community of believers – the EKKLESIA – that we know as the church. And that hell itself quivers when the church fulfills its God-given mission and lives consistently with the teachings of Jesus Christ.

And we saw that one of the defining characteristics of this community of believers would be an amazing and unstoppable grace. Today our text in Acts reveals that the church of Jesus Christ is also a community of unstoppable faith.

Our text takes us to the Jewish Temple on a typical weekday.

- Good Jews paused for prayer three times a day: At sunrise, at sunset and at three in the afternoon.
- Really good Jews prayed those prayers at the Temple, and that is exactly where Peter and John were on headed. They would be attending the 3:00 prayer service.
- They had no set agenda beyond praying. They were simply living out their faith as they went about their daily schedules.

Can I stop and make a point here? Don't overlook the fact that the events of this story were not the result of a well-thought-out strategic plan. It wasn't part of a sequence of events on one of the Apostle Paul's missionary journeys. This was simply two guys doing what they did every day of their lives. In was normal life for two guys who had an UNSTOPPABLE FAITH.

It is their faith is at the heart of this story. Because the unstoppable faith of the Christian community is ...

#1: A FAITH THAT RESTORES

Their journey that day took them to the entrance of the Temple known as "the Beautiful Gate." Some scholars believe that was the location of the events of Pentecost. If that is true, this gate held a special meaning for them. It was a popular place to enter because of its beauty. A lot of people entered the Temple that way.

Which means it would also be a good location for the third character in this drama, a beggar who had been lame from birth. This poor man had never known what it was like to stand upright. He had to be carried every place he went.

One of the great joys of Scripture is that the book of Acts was written by Luke. Luke was a medical doctor, so we always get good medical information in the stories he writes. The word he uses for "lame" tells us that he had a paralysis in the heels of his feet, right in the socket of the ankle. From birth those bones were out of joint. His only livelihood was receiving coins from people who took pity on him as they went into the time of daily prayer.

The text tells us that:

He saw Peter and John about to enter (the Temple and) he asked them for money. (Acts 3:3)

He got the attention of the two disciples, so they stopped. Then they got his attention.

Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. (Acts 3:6-7)

I paraphrase like this:

I don't have what you want, but I do have what you need.

And then Peter grabbed him by the arm and yanked him to his feet. And in that instant the lame man was lame no more. Medically, this healing would have required surgery that had not been invented yet. It would have also required months of physical therapy.

In that moment, who had the UNSTOPPABLE faith? Peter and John. The poor beggar didn't know what was going on. He might even have been filled with panic as he was being lifted to his feet.

Because of the faith of the disciples, this man experienced the UNSTOPPABLE faith that restores. And because he experienced that faith, he was able to experience ...

#2: A FAITH THAT REDEEMS

Look at verse 8:

He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. (Acts 3:8)

Catch the last two words: praising God.

This man who would never have been permitted into the Temple even earlier that day, danced his way into the very presence of God. Never once did he give credit to the disciples for his healing. His healing had come in the "name of Jesus of Nazareth." And so all praise was rightly directed to God.

Peter makes that clear when he addresses the surprised worshippers at the Temple:

Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? (Acts 3:12)

By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. (Acts 3:16)

Who had UNSTOPPABLE faith now? Well, Peter, John and the unnamed formerly lame man. Before he could receive the faith that redeemed he needed to experience the faith that would restore him.

And that is typically the sequence for those who do not believe.

Before they can know the UNSTOPPABLE faith that will redeem them they need to see in us an UNSTOPPABLE faith that can restore them.

APPLICATION

In the 13th century the famous theologian, Thomas Aquinas, went to the Vatican to visit Pope Innocent II. When Aquinas arrived, the Pope was in his office, counting out a large sum of money. When he saw Aquinas, the Pope remarked, "Ah, you see, Thomas, the church no longer needs to say, Silver and gold have I none."

Aquinas responded, "Very true, Holy Father, but it is also true the church can no longer say 'Rise up and walk.'"

Somewhere along the line Christians have lost their sense of the UNSTOPPABLE faith that should characterize our ministry. The early church – the church that is able to confront the gates of hell – is a church where men and women have such a deep intimacy with God that they are convinced beyond the shadow of a doubt of two things:

1. Nothing is impossible with God.
2. God desires to work through them to confront all that is wrong in this world.

And when those two things combine, hell trembles, lives are transformed and the church thrives.

Let's pray ... Amen.