

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Third Sunday of Easter, April 19, 2015

The Beautiful Gate
Dr. Kenneth Humphreys
April 19, 2015

Acts 3:12-21

Our scripture reading this morning is a part of a sermon, a sermon given by Peter.

To fully understand it you need to understand what is being referred to in the opening verse which begins, *“When Peter saw this...”*

The thing that Peter is referring to is an astonished crowd of people rushing to him and John at a place called Solomon’s Colonnade in the Temple. They were rushing to John and Peter because they had just healed a crippled beggar who sat at the temple gate each day begging. The gate was called the “Beautiful Gate” and the man would be sitting there begging for alms. He asked Peter and John for alms but they told him that they did not have any money but that they could give him something better, healing in the name of Jesus Christ. They took his hands, helped him up, and he was healed instantly.

Previously, as a cripple, he was not permitted to enter the temple but now he joyously walked into the temple jumping for joy. The Beautiful Gate was indeed beautiful for that man that day.

The astonished crowd who saw the man walking and jumping rushed after him and John and Peter to find out how this miracle had happened and Peter began to preach to them about Christ and gave a message of both condemnation and hope.

The crowd undoubtedly included devout Jews and Jewish Christians and Peter took the opportunity to tell both groups what it meant to be a Christian but first he said, *“The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go.”* (NIV).

Were the people in this crowd the actual ones who asked for Jesus to be condemned? Some probably were, but everyone had some measure of guilt if even

indirectly.

Walter Bruggemann, et al¹, said: *“The reality is that **all** present at Jesus’ trial and crucifixion, even those closest to him, bore some measure of blame, even if their acquiescence was only passive. Jews and Romans, high officials and ordinary people, those who feared the God of Israel and those who did not --- all were culpable. It was not ‘they’ (however ‘they’ might be identified) who killed Jesus, but ‘we’, that is, humankind.”*

Peter went on to say, *“You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer (Barabbas) be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead.”* (NIV).

Strong condemnation like this from the mouth of Peter if said to a crowd today would lead to strong protests of innocence, but the people weren’t innocent, just as we aren’t innocent today of sin and turning away from God.

But Peter then changes his accusatory tone and says, *“Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer.*

¹⁹ *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out ...”* (NIV).

In today’s vernacular, Peter is making a perfect segue here going from condemnation to salvation.

Again quoting Walter Bruggemann, et al², *“... that which began as a word of judgment is now not judgment at all, but a proclamation of the healing, empowering love of God, a love that not even the plots of evil men and women can frustrate ... God not only overruled the evil and ignorant intentions of human beings, but now stands ready to forgive them. In a perverse way, those who crucified Jesus were actually and unwittingly working toward the fulfillment of what God had promised, a suffering Messiah.”*

Peter’s sermon points out the paradox over the death of Jesus. The trial and crucifixion is presented as the worst kind of miscarriage of justice. Jesus is an innocent martyr who through his resurrection is vindicated. Luke shows the irony of the situation. The choice was between a murderer, Barabbas, one who took lives, and the author of life, Jesus. The Jews chose death over life.

That injustice righted on Easter Sunday morning. A loving God overruled what sinful humans had done and set right those things which were wrongfully done.

The Lectionary suggested reading for this morning ends with the words, *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out ...”* (NIV). This is only half of verse 19.

“Repent and your sins will be wiped out...” In the words of William Barclay³, *“This repentance will have certain consequences. It will affect the **past**; sins will be **wiped out**. This is a vivid word. Ancient writing was upon papyrus and the ink had no acid in it. It therefore did not bite into the papyrus like modern ink, but simply lay on top of it. To erase the writing a man simply wiped it away with a wet sponge; so God wipes out the sin of the forgiven man.”*

I chose today to go beyond the Lectionary and continue the reading through verse 21 as follows: *“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.”* (NIV).

The additional 2-1/2 verses really are the punch line for Peter’s sermon and my message to you today.

We are sinners, sinners who have been forgiven through the death and resurrection of our Lord and Savior, Jesus, the Christ. We must repent of our sins and accept Christ to truly be saved but it goes beyond that. Jesus is our appointed Messiah who had ascended to the Father but he will come again. With the added 2-1/2 verses to the suggested reading from Luke, *“... the eventual return of Christ is understood to be the hope toward which the present miraculous moment (the lame man’s present miraculous moment, that is) points with joy and anticipation.”*⁴

The event at the Beautiful Gate was indeed a beautiful moment in the growth of our faith.

Alleluia! Amen.

1. Texts for Preaching, Year B, Walter Bruggemann, et al, Westminster/John Knox Press, Louisville, KY, 1993.
2. *ibid.*
3. The Acts of the Apostles, rev. ed., William Barclay, The Westminster Press,

Philadelphia, 1976.

4. Walter Bruggemann, et al, op cit.

All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011