

When we read stories like Peter and John healing the man at the temple gate, the question I'm always left with is, where has our confidence in God gone? Why is it we read these stories in scripture, but we don't see them happening or hear them being talked about in our churches today? Why do we not have the same confidence that Peter and John displayed when they walked up to this crippled man and said, **'in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'** (Acts 3:6)

In the previous chapter we read how this very early and growing church were constantly meeting together in worship and prayer. To meet in this way was part of the culture, it was as much about socialising as worship – this was how friends came together.

At the start of chapter 3 we see this in action, Peter and John were on their way to the temple to pray. It was normal for Jews to meet for prayer three times throughout the day and this was something the early church continued with. As they were coming to the temple gates a man who had been lame since birth was being carried to the place where he would sit and beg from those making their way into the temple.

Again, this would have been very much an accepted part of the culture of the day. There was a close connection between providing for the poor and worship and so it would have been expected that devout men and women going to temple would have given **alms** to those begging at the temple gates. *Note though that this man is outside the temple, he wasn't taken inside the courts of the temple to worship with the others.*

When Peter and John approached him, he asked for money.

*Again, remember how the church had been selling land and houses in order to provide for those in need and so this man may well have been expecting something from Peter and John, certainly if we were reading this story for the first time, we would be expecting him to receive some money or food or something from them.*

We do know the story and instead of money Peter said, **'Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.'** (Acts 3:6) This wasn't just a bold statement, Peter displayed a confidence in God most of would find breathtaking because he reached down, took this man by the hand and helped him to his feet.

The man got up, felt his feet and ankles strengthen and to the astonishment of the people around he went into the temple jumping and leaping and praising God (to quote the song). The man who was left on the outside without the opportunity to worship with everyone else, was leaping and praising God with more enthusiasm than most.

Are you like me; left wondering what has changed, where has our confidence in this Jesus of Nazareth gone – have we ever prayed, **in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk** and then reached out to help someone to their feet? We say we believe in a God who does not change, we say **Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.** (Hebrews 13:8) Yet our confidence in him is not the same today (or certainly my confidence is not the same as that of Peter and John's)

As we can imagine the crowd at the temple was so astonished that Peter had to offer some kind of explanation. Peter actually asked the same question we're asking today, **why does this surprise you?** (Acts 3:12)

Peter then went on to remind the people of who God is, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God who displayed so much in terms of his miraculous power throughout the Old Testament scriptures. He then talked about Jesus, having come from God and who displayed this same miraculous power throughout his life, something Peter and John witnessed firsthand.

Peter's explanation then took a dark turn because he clearly laid the blame for Jesus' death at the feet of the crowd. **You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life...** (Acts 3:14-15)

Crucially though Peter didn't leave the crowd drowning in this guilt because he went on to explain God knew what was happening, that it was always his plan for the Messiah to suffer. It is because Jesus suffered that Peter was then able to make this offer. **Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...** (Acts 3:19)

Peter wasn't talking to the people based on his knowledge from a textbook. He wasn't talking about an unproven theory he hoped was right. He was talking about something he'd personally experienced. Remember how he had disowned Jesus, remember how in the days after Jesus' resurrection he had almost given up any hope of Jesus forgiving him for his cowardice. So much so, in John's gospel we read about him going back to his old life as a fisherman.

Then, while fishing he spotted Jesus on the shore and having made a mad dash of a swim to get to Jesus, he was taken aside and had that painful do you love me conversation where he experienced what it really means to be forgiven by Jesus.

Peter experienced the **times of refreshing** that he talked about to this crowd, he experienced the power of the gospel in his life he experienced the change that only Jesus can bring about. Everything he talked about to this crowd, Peter experienced.

This is where his confidence came from. It was because of what Peter experienced in his life, what he saw Jesus do for others and what he did for him that filled with him such confidence.

Folks, does our lack of confidence in Jesus come from a lack of experience of Jesus? Is it that we have come to Jesus and sought his forgiveness, we have placed our trust in him, or at least we keep trying to place our trust in him – but the reality is that there is another voice that keeps saying to us, not for you. Jesus may forgive others, he may offer unconditional acceptance to others, but not for you, because you have done, you are, you could never be. A voice reminds us of what we have done to Jesus, you disowned, you murdered the author of life.

This means we have never truly allowed ourselves to believe just how much we have been transformed, we don't believe that God really has loved us with a life changing love – we are saved, because salvation is based on what God has done for us, not how we feel, but we've never fully experienced that, because we haven't had the confidence to believe that God can work his wonders in our life.

Is this why our confidence in God is so easily shaken?

To be clear I am not saying that unanswered prayer, or people not being healed is because of our lack of faith. Not at all – that is a dangerous and hurtful thing to say.

What I am asking is our reluctance to pray in the way Peter and John prayed because something has stopped us from experiencing the transformational power of God in our lives, and if we haven't experienced this transformational power, how can we offer it to others.

The overwhelming message we all need to hear this morning is this: Because God has raised Jesus Christ from the dead, because he has been seated at the right hand of the father in heaven, because the Spirit has come to empower us and comfort us. We can be and are being changed by God. In repentance and faith, we know what it is to receive times of refreshment in place of the guilt of sin. There is nothing in this world that can take that away from us or hold it back from us.

This morning then all we are simply being asked to do is believe. Believe we are who God says we are because of Jesus Christ and not what we think of ourselves. We are to believe we are defined by our futures and not our past, because of Jesus and so live this gospel life, this new life, to experience it for ourselves.

It is in experiencing all that Jesus has done for us, that we have the confidence to say ***in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.***