

## **Times of Refreshing**

**Acts 3:11-19**

**April 18, 2021**

Our passage, which is from the lectionary, a set group of scripture passages begins in the middle of a story. Peter and John walk by a crippled man sitting by a gate near the temple. The man asks for money, and instead of giving him money, Peter famously says, "Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." The passage says the man began walking and jumping and praising God. This where we pick up our passage for today.

Before I read it, let us pray: Stir in us now, Holy Spirit, a willingness to hear, the desire to know the truth and the courage to follow in joyful obedience, that we may be formed by your word into women and men of faith. Amen

Read Acts 3:11-19

While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. <sup>12</sup> When Peter saw this, he said to them: "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? <sup>13</sup> 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. <sup>14</sup> You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. <sup>15</sup> You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. <sup>16</sup> 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.

Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. <sup>18</sup> But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. <sup>19</sup> Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...

The Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God.

The big news this week in our church was the patio sale. The patio sale is a magnificent ministry that we do. It was one of the things we are known for in our community. We provide a way for people to get rid of their things when they have to move. Often times, a spouse dies and remaining partner must move into a smaller place, or move back near the kids. Or a parent dies and the children come from other states to deal with emptying a house or apartment. We come in and take what they don't want. Often times, we are called to empty a whole house. It is a great relief for the families that we offer such a ministry.

Many of you pour your hearts and souls and your bodies into this ministry. And when it is all said and done, the money raised goes to the 15 mission and charitable organizations we help support. It is a wonderful ministry.

But when I read this scripture passage there is a little "ding" that goes off in the back of my head. The crowd is dazzled by the healing of the begger and they come running. They want to know who has done this remarkable thing and whether there might be more miraculous things happening. They want to give Peter and John the credit.

Imagine the impact this miracle has on Peter and John. This is their first miracle since the Resurrection of Jesus. This could have gone to their heads: wow, look what we did. We healed a crippled man!

However, when Peter and John saw the crowd giving them accolades, Peter and John immediately deflected the crowd's praise: it is not our doing, but God's. God did this in the name of Jesus Christ. God was responsible for this remarkable event. All the disciples did was participate in God's action.

People will point to this church and say what a wonderful thing we are doing. We brag about what we do, and you certainly have every right to do so. But it is not about us and our wonderful work. It is about God using us to do God's work. We do this in the name of Jesus Christ.

It is all about God.

So maybe when people say how wonderful we are, you can say something like: We do it for God. Or, we do it because we love God. Or, we do it in Jesus' name. Or, we do it because we follow Jesus. You are turning their focus off of you, this church, and onto God.

When Peter and John talked about Jesus, they gave him these wonderful names: the Holy and Righteous One, the author of life, the Messiah. It is in the Name of this One that this man was healed. A good devotion time would be to read this passage again and focus on the names of Jesus used in it.

I love the name Author of life. What does this mean for you? How can you take this name of Jesus with you this day? Is there someone you know who needs to hear the good news that Jesus is the author of life?

After telling the people about Jesus and his death and their role in it, Peter says this line, "Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." (repeat)

That is an amazing statement.

"Repent." Oh, that word has a bad reputation. It reminds us of people on the street corner calling out for people to repent or they will be thrown into hell.

Repent is a word about turning around. Turning away from those things that separate you from God (which we call sin) and turning back to God. It is actually a word of hope. I love the way C.S. Lewis says it: "Laying down your arms, surrendering, saying you are sorry, realizing that you have been on the wrong track and getting ready to start life over again from the right one."

And when you do, Peter says, your sins will be wiped out. I love this passage from the Old Testament that says God takes our sins and throws them in the deepest part of the sea (Micah 7:19). God doesn't throw them into a shallow creek where you can still see them, but in a place so deep they are never found again. Someone even said God then puts up a "No Fishing" sign. Another person calls it the Sea of Forgetfulness.

Wiped out. That is good news.

So, again, back to our passage: “Repent, then, and turn to God, so that you sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.”

I am enamored with that phrase “times of refreshing.” In fact, that phrase is why I chose this scripture passage from the lectionary.

So think about that. Think about a time when you needed to be refreshed. How you felt before and after? I bet many of you working the patio sale needed many times of refreshing.

This phrase “times of refreshing” reminded me of a backpacking trip in Glacier National Park with two friends, Pat and Andrea. This was actually our first time backpacking, and we made some rookie mistakes. We decided to take the long way up the mountain on our first day. It is on the first day that packs are the heaviest because you are carrying all your food. You haven’t eaten it to lighten your pack.

It was a hot day as we began to climb up the side of the mountain. It didn’t take long for our energy to drain away, and we began to drag. Suddenly, we came across a small stream coming down the side of the mountain, creating a mini-waterfall and crossing over our path. It was about six feet wide and only a quarter inch deep.

We did not hesitate. We threw off our heavy burdens, our packs, took off our hiking boots and socks, and began to play in the water. Never had anything been so refreshing. We finished that day’s hike in joy.

When one is refreshed, the word itself implies that, although we were once "fresh," we now need to be re-freshed. Refreshing is something that the Lord Jesus does. It comes from the presence of the Lord, and it usually comes after we've rid ourselves of things that weight us down, like taking off those heavy backpacks. We know what our heavy stuff is.

The process of ridding ourselves of this heavy stuff, is part of the process of “repent,” and then the turning back to God. Our passage says when we repent, we are refreshed.

Ok, let’s tie this all together.

Everything that happens in Acts points to God. It is about the power of God. It is about how God’s power heals, challenges, convicts, even angers people in the name of Christ. It is about accepting this God in Christ who brings times of refreshing to needy, aching hearts.

We tend to forget this singular truth in our ministries. Churches have a tendency to get caught up in maintaining the church structure, money, possessions, meetings. It is so easy to do. But the church is to always be about God, the One who refreshes us. We are called to help people lay down their heavy burdens and help them turn to God so their sins will be wiped out and be refreshed by the presence of our Lord.

Something wonderful has been happening here on Sunday mornings these past few weeks. As I greet people leaving the worship service, I don’t hear “The music was good today,” or “Nice sermon,” or I liked the singer today.” Instead I am hearing: “That was a beautiful worship service. “ And you look into their eyes, and you know that they have been touched and refreshed by God. Because the service was all about God.

We gave people the opportunity to repent, to throw off those heavy things that weigh them down. We assure you that your sins are wiped out and call you to turn back to God, so you will be refreshed in the presence of the Lord.

So may we continue to cultivate the presence of God with us. May we point to God in all we do. May we be a church that survives not because of our clever plans, but because of the work of God among us. When visitors come, may they say, “God is here,” and return again and again for more refreshing. May you always find those times of refreshing in the presence of Jesus in this place.

Amen.           The Apostle’s Creed