

Eastminster Worship Services

Sunday, June 28, 2009

Faith Factor
“Confidence”

Acts 3:11-26

Rev. Dr. Steven M. Marsh, Senior Pastor

And he just stared at the ground. What had just happened? Lewis Smedes writes,

Gigantic cranes hoisted the steel beams from boat to dock by means of immense electro-magnets, each of them about three feet thick, eight feet in diameter, and weighing about fifteen tons. The magnets hung at the end of a two-inch cable which was, in turn, controlled by an operator sitting in a cab above the docks. I was standing on the ground blankly watching the theater of steel bustling around me when a shadow fell over me, which seemed odd, because there were no trees or building that could cast a shadow.

I looked up and saw one of those immense magnets ten feet above me. Stevedores [Dock workers] ducked in and under these magnets all day long without giving them a thought, but I did not feel safe with that monster hovering over me, so I took a long step away. At that instant, the magnet crashed to earth and scraped the heel of my shoe as it landed. Rushing to investigate, the crane operator discovered that the cable holding the tons of magnetized steel above my head had been frayed down to a few threads of wire just before it crashed. Later on, away from the docks, I wondered whether God himself could have pushed me out of the way of that magnet just in time to save my neck and get my attention at the same time. It seemed absurd to wonder whether the Maker of the Universe would go to such extreme lengths to get the attention of a failed steel man. But then again, I had been less than a tenth of a second away from being crushed to the thickness of a dime, and such things do not happen every day.¹

Acts 3 recounts the story of the healing of a crippled man outside the temple. The second chapter of Acts ends with a picture of the church gathered for teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread and prayers. The followers of Jesus held all things in common. The early church not only found favor from within but from outside as well. The church's gathering is not a detour around the misery of the world. The path of being and making disciples is the way that goes straight through, not around, human misery.

Remember the church. The church is the body of Christ; it is to be Jesus in the world. Jesus Christ came not to teach an interesting philosophy of life, but to call people to a new way of living and dying. Acts teaches us ecclesiology; the nature and purpose of the church. There is a difference between going to church and being the church.

So far in our study of Acts, we have looked at the faith factors of boldness, devotion and forthrightness.

¹Lewis Smedes, *My God and I: A Spiritual Memoir* (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003), 47-48.

Boldness in that followers of Jesus are to be confident, daring and courageous.² Devotion in that followers of Jesus are to be singular, particular and loyal in their commitment to Jesus Christ.³ Forthrightness in that followers of Jesus are to demonstrate their direct and outspoken enthusiasm for Jesus.⁴ This morning, we look at the faith factor of confidence. By definition, confidence is "the belief that one can have faith in or rely on someone or something."⁵ That is followers of Jesus have belief in and rely on the name of Jesus to accomplish the purpose of Jesus in the world.

Remember the crippled man. There was no cure or hope for him. The man had been crippled from birth. He had never been capable of supporting his own weight. He was "carried to the temple gate, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts." The man begged to sustain his existence.

Remember, the Roman government. It did not have medical benefits or social services to care for the crippled man's needs. It was not the role of government to provide medical benefits or social services. The crippled man's only income came from begging.

Remember the crippled man who was a beggar. Beggars were not shy. They didn't just look pitiful, they sounded pitiful. The crippled man did what totally dependent and helpless people often do; ask for a handout. The Bible states that Peter responded to the man's request in this way: "Look at us! Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." The man gave them his attention. "Taking him by the right hand, he (Peter) helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong."⁶ Peter commanded the crippled man to walk. Peter reached out and grabbed the man's hand. Instantaneously "the man's feet and ankles became strong." As strength came in to his joints, the man went into the temple "walking and jumping, and praising God."

Remember the people. What did the people think when they saw the healed beggar? "They recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him."⁷ What did Peter have to offer? Peter had the power of the name of Jesus. The message of Jesus was about healing; the healing of mind, body, soul and spirit. The community of followers had

²*Concise Oxford Dictionary*, Tenth Edition (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 1999), 155.

³Ibid., 393.

⁴Ibid., 558.

⁵Ibid., 299.

⁶Acts 3:7

⁷Acts 3:10

that same power to offer healing.

There were plenty of people in Luke's day who were willing to blame the crippled man's condition on his sin or the sin of his parents. In our day the conventional explanation for such physical infirmity lies more along the lines of certain biological or physiological causes. In the eyes of the faithful community, both the heartache and the healing of the world's misery are read differently. Joel had promised signs of the earth beneath⁸ and when asked about the authenticity of his own mission, Jesus responded that the blind will receive their sight, the lame will walk, lepers will be cleansed, the deaf will hear, the dead will be raised up and the poor will have the good news preached to them.⁹ Either the church is able to point to signs of healing power at work in the world because of what has happened in Jesus Christ or the community is without evidence for its claims. Healing power is unleashed in the name of Jesus. It is under Jesus' name that the sick are healed, miracles take place and sins are forgiven.¹⁰ Neither the piety of the church nor the crippled man effected this miracle.

Remember the miracle. Nothing magical happened that day at the Gate called Beautiful. When Jesus commissioned the Twelve, he gave them power and authority over all demons and to cure diseases.¹¹ The healing of the crippled man occurred by the name of Jesus.¹² It was this Jesus who was handed over to the Roman authorities and killed in the place of a murderer. The Men of Israel handed Jesus over to be killed, but God raised him from the dead.¹³ When the crippled man walked, remember Peter's response, "Men of Israel, 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?"¹⁴ In other words, what Peter was addressing is that what took place should be commonplace. Healings should be the ongoing work of the church as followers of Jesus remain confident in their faith that the name of Jesus is powerful. Do not be surprised, God uses ordinary people to do his work. Stop staring and get on with the work of Jesus' ministry.

Remember Moses. He was called by God while he was tending sheep. Remember David. He was called by God as a young boy. These were ordinary men and ordinary times. Moses was an ordinary person. He was not a great speaker. In fact, he was so unimpressive as a speaker, he asked God to let his brother Aaron help him. David was an ordinary person. Yes, he conquered Goliath, but before the battle, his brothers told him to go home and take

⁸Acts 2:19; Joel 2:28-32

⁹Luke 7:22

¹⁰Acts 3:6, 16; 4:7, 10, 30; 10:43

¹¹Luke 9:1-6

¹²Acts 3:16

¹³Acts 3:14-16

care of the sheep, because that was all they thought he was good for.

Remember the crippled man. You've seen him. He lives on the streets in Old Town. He gathers across from the Library for Church on the Street. He is standing on the islands at intersections asking for money. You don't expect anything great out of him. We are often tempted to say, God can't work through me. I'm too ordinary. But if God can work through a speech-impaired Moses or an untrained David, he can certainly work through any one of us.

Remember the crippled man. He asked for money. Loose change is what he was expecting. He had been that way since birth. He had never known any other way of life.

Remember Peter and John. When the crippled man encountered Peter and John and asked for money, he was told, "We have no silver or gold." But what they did have, they shared freely. And the man was healed. For the first time in his life, he walked. The man asked for something ordinary. God acted in an extraordinary way.

In the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, the people had grown tired of praying to God. There was violence, war and terror in the land. The book begins with the people asking God, "How long must we cry out for help? We pray, and you don't answer." And then God spoke and said, "Look and watch and be utterly amazed. For I am going to do something in your days that you would not believe, even if you were told."¹⁵

Remember the faith factor, confidence. Be confident. To be as follower of Jesus is to be a witness to God's powerful action in response to human rejection. You may be tempted to rest upon the smug self-assurance of salvation by election. But God is determined to have a people who are faithful to his promises. As a follower of Jesus, you have belief in and rely on the name of Jesus to accomplish his purpose in the world. As followers of Jesus, you are the church. Staring is not an option. Let us pray!

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1958 N. Webb Road • Wichita, Kansas 67206-3404 • p 316.634.0337 f 316.634.1496 • www.eastminster.org

¹⁴Acts 3:12

¹⁵Habakkuk 1:5