

Times of refreshing
Bible reading: Acts 3.14-26

*And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong,
whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus
has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you.*

“I can’t fall, because I’m bwave”, said three-year-old Benji, joyously climbing down the outside of the banisters. (“Oh yes you can,” said his Gran. “Get down at once!”). Wouldn’t it be wonderful to have the sublime confidence of a three-year-old! Learning to walk as an adult needs some of that three-year old confidence — even more, when everybody’s looking at you and wondering if you can do it. Faith is another word for trust — knowing there’s somebody there to hold on to (v.11). In these early chapters of Acts, we see the first Christians learning to walk the way of faith with astonishing confidence — and finding all along the way that there is Somebody to hold on to.

Acts ch.3 is a story about healing. Healing flowing from faith in Jesus (v.16). It is faith in Jesus that gives Peter the courage to look the lame man gently but firmly in the face, instead of stepping over him or dropping an embarrassed coin in his hat (v.4). It is faith in Jesus that gives Peter the confidence to say, *I have no silver or gold, but what I have, I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk* (v.6). Peter doesn’t have money, but he has something far more important — a connection with the Author of life (v.14), the life flowing from God and longing to pour out showers of blessing on God’s people (v.20). Peter can’t solve anybody’s problem on his own (v.12) — but he knows a man who can. He has known the life-giving power of Jesus in his own life, and that gives him the courage to look the lame man in the face.

But there’s a lot of pain in this story too. Healing and wholeness flow from Jesus, the Author of life — yet Jesus died. Only a few weeks ago, Peter had watched in horror as this same Jerusalem crowd had turned on Jesus and rejected him (vv.13-14). Jesus became the scapegoat, the innocent victim of mob violence, like so many before and since. Peter himself had been caught up in the cycle of fear and violence, and denied his Lord (Luke 22.54-62). How can there be healing, after such a betrayal of trust? It’s easy to blame society, or peer pressures, or the culture — but that doesn’t absolve us from personal responsibility. As any teacher knows, we can’t change without accepting the truth about who we are.

But that isn’t the end of the story. There is something stronger than the pain of betrayal, and that’s the power of forgiveness. The cycle of violence stops when the innocent victim absorbs the hatred and refuses to retaliate: “Father, forgive them for they do not know what they are doing” (Luke 23.34). *I know that you acted in ignorance*, Peter says (v.17); and, astonishingly, it was all part of God’s plan (v.18). You know now the worst that humanity is capable of: you’ve seen it in yourself. Now turn around and see the open hand held out to invite you into the best that God is calling you to: *Repent, therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out,*

so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord (vv.19-20). This is what all God's promises are about; it's what all the prophets were saying, including Moses himself (vv.22-23 — see Deuteronomy 18.15-20). In fact, it goes right back to old father Abraham himself (v.25). God's original promise (Genesis 12.3) was a promise of blessing for the whole world — and that means you (Acts 2.39). All you have to do is to put out your hand and say Yes.

*Put your hand in the hand of the man who stilled the water:
Put your hand in the hand of the man who calmed the sea:
Take a look at yourself and you can look at others differently —
By putting your hand in the hand of the man from Galilee.*

God bless, Loveday