

In our story today the fledgling Christian church, in Jerusalem, was growing rapidly. It must have been a really exciting time. Our context is a healing miracle and the talk Peter subsequently gave which led to his and John's arrest.

I imagine Peter, John and maybe the other apostles went into the temple courts regularly to speak about Jesus. It's always busy as they approach the temple gate, many disabled people are gathered there hoping for some money. The man in this story is over 40 years old and we are told he had been lame from birth. This means he had never entered the temple, being disabled he would have been considered unclean under Jewish law. He was brought everyday to sit in the same place. Passers by recognised him. Maybe some chatted to him like we might to a Big Issue seller.

This man asked for money, Peter realised that God wanted to heal him, so Peter said "Look at us." The man gave them his attention thinking a few coins were coming his way. "Silver and gold I do not have but what I do have I give you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk". Peter helped him to his feet and immediately the man was healed. Whole and well he was able to enter the temple for the first time. He jumped, danced, everyone witnessed the miracle.

The religious leaders were very alarmed, they had Peter and John arrested and the next morning brought before them with the man who had been healed. Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, and many of the Sanhedrin who had tried Jesus, were there. These same men had mistakenly thought they could stop Jesus' ministry by executing him. No way, we are told that, by this time, there were more than 5000 believers in Jerusalem.

The religious leaders started to question Peter and John, so many had seen the healing, they couldn't refute it but wanted to know how it was done. "By what power did you do this?"

Power! Yes Power, the religious leaders loved having power. Power in itself is not a bad thing. We need power to get things done but it's shared power that's always preferable. The religious leaders felt they had the right to wield "power over" the people due to their position and education. In this scenario, I think, they feared losing power and felt threatened. When that's the case the instinct is to blame, accuse or attack others. That's what they are doing here, what they did in the trial of Jesus. That's what we all can do at times!

We are told Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit. He speaks confidently and boldly. What a different man Peter is now, to the one who denied Jesus 3 times. Peter asks "why they are being called to account for showing kindness to a lame man and healing him in the name of Jesus". Kindness is a hallmark of followers of Jesus.

Peter quotes or rather misquotes Ps 118, which is an ancient prayer rejoicing in God's victory. Peter says "the stone YOU builders rejected, has become the cornerstone" Jesus is the cornerstone, holding everything that exists together. Peter changes the "the" in the original Psalm to "you". The religious leaders rejected Jesus.

Peter continues "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved". Jesus alone saves us.

This was another challenge to the religious leaders who prided themselves as God's chosen people, who made themselves right with God by keeping the law. The Greek word for saved used here is sozo. It also means healed, whole, preserve. In Jesus we get the whole package.

It is gift, all pure gift, God's gift - there is nothing we can do to save ourselves other than turn to Christ. As it says in Galatians 2 if we could make ourselves right with God then Jesus died for nothing.

How shocked the religious leaders must have been? They craved more power and feared losing what they had. This is such a contrast to Jesus who has all the power and gives it all away. The weakness of Jesus as He dies on the cross. Such love, such vulnerability, to save us, to heal us, preserve us and make us whole. The resurrection proves triumph through weakness is God's way.

Verse 13 of Acts 4 says: "When the religious leaders saw the courage of Peter and John and realised that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus".

What does "being with Jesus" mean for us today? Sharing our everyday lives with Jesus. That's what the resurrection makes possible.

St Paul tells us that in prayer he sensed Jesus say to him "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness"(2 Cor 12:9). It was Jesus' power flowing through Peter's weakness that healed the lame man.

Jesus is the same yesterday, today and forever. What He did then He does now! Jesus invites us, yes, you and me to yield our lives to Him to be used for His purposes. I'm not pretending this is easy. It's counter cultural to really face our weakness and vulnerability.

But as we spend time with Jesus, in prayer and worship, offering our broken lives to Him, listening out for the promptings of His Holy Spirit, His power will flow through us, just as it did in Peter and John 2000 years ago and amazing things will happen!

Amen.

