

## “Empty Pockets: Full Hearts” Acts 3:1-10

Peter and John are on their way to church for a prayer meeting. Well, actually it was the Temple but it was a prayer time. Peter and John, filled with the Holy Spirit and power knew they still needed the spiritual discipline of regular times of prayer.

So at 3:00 in the afternoon they head to the temple for a prayer meeting, and at the door to the temple grounds was a beggar. He was lame from birth, so he had never walked or run or danced. He was taken by friends to various places where he could beg for a few coins so he could buy some bread.

Today the friends put him by the gate at the temple. That was a good place because people going to church should be generous, right?

As Peter and John passed the beggar, he asked them for some money. I wonder how many times this man had asked Peter and John for money in the past? I wonder if they had ever walked by him, ignoring his pleas for help as they hurried into the temple so they would not be late for prayers?

This day things were different. Peter and John stopped and fixed their eyes on the man. I am not sure exactly what that means, except this: they really saw him this time. They saw him as a man in need, a man loved by God, a man without much hope. They see him ask one worshipper after another for money, noting that most of the people ignored him and just walked by.

As Peter and John fix their eyes on the man, I am sure they are praying, asking the Holy Spirit what they should do next.

I cannot help but wonder if Peter and John are taken back in their minds to a hillside on the outskirts of Capernaum in Galilee, where 5000 men, plus women and children, gathered to hear Jesus teach. As the day wore on it was clear the people were not leaving and they were getting hungry. The disciples suggest the only practical thing to do was for Jesus to send the people away so they can find themselves some food.

But what does Jesus say? “You feed them.”

The disciples are confused. “We only have five dinner buns and two small fish. How is that supposed to help the situation?”

You remember the story. Jesus has the people sit down, he takes the bread and fish, blesses it, breaks it and gives it to the people. Scripture tells us that the people all ate until they were satisfied that day. They were stuffed! Then the disciples picked up the leftovers and found they still had twelve baskets full of food left over. Not bad for five buns and two small fish!

That day the disciples learned that if you give what you have to Jesus he will meet the needs. However, it takes faith.

Peter and John may have been thinking of that day as they fixed their eyes on the beggar. Now they knew what they had to do.

“Look at us,” they said. The man gladly gave them his attention, anticipating a gift of a few coins, but the first words out of Peter’s mouth dashed all the beggar’s hopes: “Silver and gold I do not have.” “I am broke!” is what he was saying.

“A lot of help these two blokes are,” thought the beggar. “Why are you interrupting my work here?”

Peter goes on and says, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I do have I give to you.” Peter and John have the attention of the beggar again. Maybe they have some bread, or fish, or cheese, or fruit – something he could eat. That would be helpful. Or maybe they have an extra coat they would share, or a blanket.

But that is not what the disciples have to share. The only thing they have that they can share is - Jesus.

“In the name of Jesus Christ, of Nazareth, rise up and walk.”

Peter takes the man by the hand and helped him stand up. That’s right, after spending his whole life as a cripple, unable to get off the ground, he was now standing, then walking and finally leaping!

The man who used to be lame was so excited he disturbed the worship service that day. Some people were quite upset to see all that enthusiasm brought to church, but I suspect there were some who were happy to finally see life in the temple!

What a beautiful scene as Jesus, through Peter and John, heals the lame man. Can we see the lessons here?

- there are things more important than money. Too many times our first thought when we see a need is to ask, “How much will it cost?”

- the greatest need people have today is to know and receive Jesus in their lives. People are chasing all kinds of things in life, but missing the real prize: Jesus.

- disciples of Jesus, Christians, always have something to share with a needy world. We have Jesus. Jesus is the one who can heal us spiritually, emotionally and physically.

- the heart of a Christian is to share what God has given them. Yes, that will include money. By the way, the General Superintendent wanted me to relay back to you his gratitude for your generosity. Because you gave to Missions the work of the church continues around the world, even in the war torn areas like Ukraine, carries on.

God's people are a generous people because we have received so much ourselves from God. We have received new life through faith in Jesus, forgiveness of sin and a cleansed heart as we repented of our sin and by faith trusted in Jesus alone for salvation. We have received the Holy Spirit, God's gift to bring His power and strength and purity into our lives.

We have been given much. Therefore we are willing to share what we have with others in Jesus' name.

When the war broke out in the Ukraine, we were called to collect items to send to the people in need. Immediately you responded, and I told you there would be a container sent as soon as possible. Then we heard there would be two containers. Now six containers have been sent, three with food and three with other needed supplies, including equipment to set up medical clinics.

Once the containers get to countries like Poland, the supplies are put into vans and taken close to the borders. From there the supplies are transferred to cars which are driven over the borders. From there some supplies are put into backpacks to take to the most dangerous places. Some of the carriers will not make the return trip. But they will go, and others will follow, because as Christians they cannot stand by and watch their brothers and sisters suffer. Love commands them to do something...

General Superintendent Dr. David Busic told us a story that came from his days as a pastor. His church had taken a team to Swaziland, Africa, to see if there was anything they could do to help the people who were caught up in the Aids epidemic. Swaziland was the epicenter of the epidemic, with 27% of adults between the ages of 15-49 years of age being infected. This was leaving an ever growing number of children without anyone to care for them.

So Dr. Busic and his team went to one of the worst hit areas, and when they arrived it looked like a lunar landscape. The ground was dry and barren. There were no adults, just a few children with large, extended stomachs, sure signs of malnutrition. There was no grass, no livestock, not even wild animals.

The team noticed a windmill, which was meant to power a water pump, but it was broken. On the team was a man named Fred Evans, an engineer, who inspected the windmill and decided it could not be fixed. The team flew home, deflated and overwhelmed by the great needs they saw.

A few days after the team returned, Fred Evans marched into Dr. Busic's office at the church and slapped a piece of paper on the desk. "I have the solution!" he said. "I have designed the only solar powered pump in the world, and it will keep pumping as long as there is sunshine!"

"How much will it cost to build the prototype?" Dr. Busic asked. Fred told him the amount, and Dr. Busic said the church would pay it. The prototype was built and taken to the valley in Swaziland where the team had seen so little life. Dr. Busic did not make this trip, but Fred said

he installed the new solar powered windmill and pump and when they turned it on ... it worked perfectly. The valley had water once again.

That in itself would be a great story to show how believers give what they have to change the lives of others. But the story does not quite end there. You may note that most of your bottled water has either Coca-Cola or Pepsi in the fine print on the bottom. These companies control the largest supply of fresh water in the world. They knew of the water crisis in third world countries but could not find a way to get water to the people. One of the staffers had heard of Fred's solar powered windmill and suggested this might be the answer. Fred was contacted by the multi-billion dollar corporation who offered to buy his patent. Fred said sure, but on one condition: more wells be supplied for the people in that valley in Swaziland. Wherever there was a Nazarene mission there needed to be a well.

Coca-Cola agreed, and new wells were provided in Swaziland. Dr. Busic went back a couple of years later to the valley where he first saw the starving children and the desolate landscape. Now, however, the valley was full of green plants as far as the eye could see. The children, now healthy and strong, were leading cattle and goats through the grasslands. Houses were everywhere, along with dozens of Nazarene churches. The wells not only brought physical water but opened the door for the people to encounter the living water, Jesus Christ. There are not only thousands of new Nazarenes in the area, but tens of thousands!

The representatives from the Coca-Cola company who accompanied Dr. Busic on that second trip said that these people called Nazarenes were a strange bunch. When the company offered to build holding tanks to capture the water so they could keep it to themselves, the people laughed. They said, it was not their water, it was from God and it was meant to be shared.

God has poured his love into the hearts of believers through the Holy Spirit, Paul tells us in Romans 5:5. This is why Christians cannot walk by a need without doing something. And today we are reminded that the greatest gift we can give people is not money, or food or clothing, as necessary as these things are. The greatest thing we can give people is Jesus. He alone can change lives and make people whole. He is still in the business of healing broken lives today!

This morning, are you ready to have the Holy Spirit open your eyes to the needs around you? Are you ready to share Jesus with the people Jesus helps you see? Do you believe Jesus can truly meet the needs of the people today?

You may not always have something in your pocket to share, but that is okay. You always carry Jesus with you, and may you courageously, and joyfully, share him with those you see in need.