

man--the man who had to be carried to and from the gate--and he called out to those who passed. Peter and John happened to be passing. They had probably passed this man before--it would have been the man's normal location. This time, though, Peter stooped and looked intently at the beggar, and suddenly a drama unfolded. He told the beggar, "Silver and gold I do not have. I will give you what I do have, though. In the name of Jesus, stand up and walk." I don't have money, says Peter, but I do have Jesus. Jesus can make you whole. And the power of that truth healed the beggar lame from birth. The description of the beggar delights me. "Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God." Can't you just see it? This man with years of infirmity and frailty leaping about in the temple precincts, all astonished and wondering and loving the feel of legs that actually supported him. He had a ball!

The people around the men were also amazed and astonished, and wondered. They knew the beggar who sat there every day, lame from birth. This was not a stranger, a ringer from some unknown place who claimed a miracle. This was a man whom they knew and understood and who fit into the day to day rhythm of the temple activities. And he was leaping about and hopping around half-crazed with delight.

And what better time for Peter to preach. A sign, a miracle, a wonder of this sort is always, in the Bible, an invitation to the

witnesses to faith and to repentance. And Peter runs with it.
"Why do you wonder at this? Why are you so surprised? We didn't
heal this man--the power of Jesus did. the one who was crucified
because you gave him up to Pilate. remember him? He is the one
who we have all been waiting for with such longing. he is the
Holy and Righteous one of God. And it is faith in his name. in
the name of this Jesus of Nazareth. that has healed the man who
was lame all these years. Faith in this name will make all
people whole. And so, people, you can have this too. Turn away
from your old ways and put your faith in the name of Jesus. and
you, too will have this kind of new life.

Great sermon. He had the perfect sermon illustration. don't you
think?!!! If my sermons had the force of that kind of miracles
to accompany them! Peter said to the people that the name of
Jesus was the link between people and God. The community on earth
of believers found the real and active presence of the divine
because they had the story and presence of Jesus in their lives.
People were lifted out of their habitual life and thought
patterns by the power of God through the life of Christ, and they
were never the same.

We hear simplified versions of this story all of the time these
days. Some of them bug us as much as this must have bothered the
actual witnesses. The revivalists holler about having been saved
from the fires of hell by the blood of the lamb. and they invite
everyone up to the altar to be saved. too. You've heard it on
TV. The Evangelists of the airwaves use this simple formula all

of the time--believe in the name of Jesus and be saved.

They aren't wrong, of course. They may be annoying, but they aren't wrong. They are in the great line of tradition that began with Peter and stretches all through the centuries to this day. It is the call to come to Jesus and be new and whole and reborn.

What they are saying in simple and straightforward ways sometimes needs more elaboration for those of us who want to understand as well as feel. What happens to all people of faith, whether from fundamentalist churches or Quaker backgrounds, from the UCC or the Wisconsin Synod is this. The person of faith encounters the divine in some way, and is changed. It may be, for some, a wild and dramatic revival meeting with a yelling preacher man thumping a well used Bible and pouring his heart out to people. But it can take all sorts of different forms, as well. Some people encounter God in silence. Remember the story of Elijah hearing the still small voice on top of the mountain? That, too is an encounter with God. For some it is a slowly growing realization that life without faith is empty. For others it is an individual that they admire and respect who can help them see God at work in human life. Some love the creation. Some fall in love with the story of the saints through the ages. However one encounters the living power that is more than human imagining can create is fine. And once touched, one is never the same. The "how" of finding faith is fascinating and wonderful, but it is not the core of it all. The core is that one finds the divine at all. And this is what Peter invites the witnesses of a very specific

miracle to do. He invites them to open their hearts to the name of Jesus, because for Peter, it is through the power of that name, the witness of that love, that he has found the divine touch in his life, and he, for one, will never be the same. Let me share with you this glory and joy, says Peter.

So most of what we do as the community of faith is to find ways to tell our story. It is the same story down deep--that we have found life, and are forever motivated by that life. The surface details change for each of us. My story would involve music and drama and books and independence and a bit of mystery. For another it might be death that leads to life, for yet another it might be a journey of joy and goodness year after year. There is no way to predict what it is that moves a person so much that they can proclaim the goodness and the holiness and the wonder of God.

But proclaim it we must. We take the name of christian and we send money overseas, we build hospitals and form colleges, we feed the hungry and challenge the complacent and work for the children and sit with the lonely. We do whatever we can to tell the story that has given us life, and we do it all--at least in this place --in the name of Jesus, who is the face that we put on life that is meaningful and wonderful and everlasting. Amen