

Sixteenth Sunday after Pentecost; September 8, 2024

Acts 3:1-10

“Jesus Heals Perfectly”

Peter and John were going up to the temple at the ninth hour, an hour of prayer. A certain man who was lame from birth was carried there every day and placed at the temple gate, which is called Beautiful, so that he could beg for donations from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to enter the temple, he asked them for a donation.

Peter looked directly at him, as did John. Peter said, “Look at us.” So the man paid close attention to them, expecting to receive something from them.

But Peter said, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I will give you. In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!” Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately the man’s feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk. He entered the temple courts with them, walking, jumping, and praising God.

All the people saw him walking and praising God. They recognized him as the one who used to sit begging for money at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

In the Gospel, Jesus enters the land of Gentiles. They bring him a man who needs healing. No doubt the crowd and the man and even Jesus’ disciples are hoping that he will do for the man exactly what the crowd wants: **They pleaded with Jesus to place his hand on him.** Place your hand on him. Heal him. Fixed. Done. Please, Jesus.

But Jesus did not do that. Well, not exactly. He did not lay his hand on the man and heal him. Instead, he took him to a private place. Jesus dealt with the man **away from the crowd**, but apparently not too far away from his disciples. St. Peter, who was very likely the source of this Gospel account, saw and heard how Jesus healed this man. He didn’t lay his hand on him and – wham! – heal him. Jesus did something better for him. This man didn’t just need healing, he needed healing with understanding. He needed to understand that his healing was no magic trick and fluke. So Jesus took his time, touched the man, and looked up to heaven. He did better than heal. He healed and taught: I come from above. My power comes from above, and so does your healing.

It was better than healing. It was the perfect healing.

Only a few years later, Saints Peter and John walked through the Gate Beautiful of the temple in Jerusalem. As they did, they saw a man in need. And these two men, who had witnessed the perfect healing of Mark chapter 7, kept the flow of not just healing, but healing perfectly.

What healing was the man after? Hunger, nakedness, exposure: all the problems that gold and silver solve. **“Look at us.”** If you are asking for money, this is a very hopeful thing to hear. Most who give their money to people in such a position don’t stop for conversation. It’s more like, “There, now leave me alone, conscience.” So if a passerby seeks your attention, it is a very good sign. But then how his heart must have sunk: **“Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I will give you.”** “Look, man, you got my hopes up here. Silver and gold is what I need. I’m hungry. I need clothes.”

But then came better healing, perfect healing. When Jesus said, “*Ephphatha*,” and gave perfect healing, he made it clear, with body language and proto-sign language, where the healing was coming from: above. Faithful Saints Peter and John did verbally, but they communicated the same thing: perfect healing is from on high. **“In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, get up and walk!”**

After Peter raised the man up, he obeyed Peter’s order. He walked. He also ran and jumped. He wasn’t healed to shuffle or limp. He was healed to jump with joy. And just as they did in the Gospel, the people were amazed: God doesn’t just heal, he heals perfectly. Just the healing that’s needed most, in just the right way, with glory given to the right place.

Do you wish God would heal you like that? We’re all damaged people, and we all need healing. Some are damaged more than others, but it’s not a competition. We all need God’s healing. What kind of healing do you want? Do you want your hearing restored? Do you want financial healing, more silver and gold (or at least enough to live)? Do you want to be able to run and jump again? Do you want a broken relationship restored? God heals us perfectly.

But where are our hearts when we think of divine healing? Why do we think so quickly about aches and credit card debt and people who don’t talk to us anymore? Are we so shallow and short-sighted? Well...yes, we are. Here’s the thing: there’s a bigger, better, healing that we need, and if we don’t have this healing, there’s a world of hurt in store for us that will make the problems of this world seem like paradise. If you’re not healed of sin, you have hell waiting for you, and it’s going to be a whole lot worse than any problem you can have now, or ever imagine having.

God pictures sin as a disease – a disease passed down from Adam and Eve through the ages, all the way down to us. An illness inside that proves its presence with all kinds of evil thoughts, unkind words, and rebellious actions. It is the doubly-terminal disease that will kill not only the body but the soul, too, and do it forever.

God heals it perfectly. His Son comes down to heal our sin. We inherit it; he did not. He was conceived by the Holy Spirit in the womb of the Virgin Mary. Our sin proves its presence in our thoughts and words, the good we fail to do and the evil we do. His holiness proved itself in perfect kindness, patience, and obedience to the Father’s will. His righteousness heals our sin.

On Thursday night, his hands, his feet, and his head were still whole. His hands were whole to wash feet and hold out bread and wine, which he called his body and blood. His feet were whole to walk to the Garden, his hands whole to fold in prayer and ask for his Father’s will to be done. His feet were whole to stand before Pilate, and to march to Calvary. And then, he was pierced and crushed. And, in the words of Isaiah the prophet: **The punishment that brought us peace was on him. By his wounds we are healed.** He healed us of our sin by dying for it. And he removed the curse of hell from us by going through it in our place. By his wounds we are healed of sin and hell.

And he rose to heal the ultimate evil: death. His hands moved again to fold grave clothes; his feet moved again to walk out of his grave. He healed what’s worse than illness: death.

When Peter and John healed the man, he jumped into the temple. You and I, healed from sin and hell and death will stand up and walk and run and jump in the heavenly temple. The man they healed by the Gate called Beautiful ran into the building that was a picture of the heavenly temple – healed. You and I will stand up and run into the real thing: the temple of heaven – healed by Jesus.

Yes, when Jesus heals, he does it perfectly and completely. And he does it personally. He touched the man and spoke to him eye to eye. Peter told the man, “**Look at us.**” He healed him, eye to eye. Jesus heals the world, but his healing is personal for you. In baptism’s water he looked you in the eye and healed you personally of your sin. And – perfect healer that he is – he heals again and again, with every gospel proclamation, with each Communion, to leave no doubt to the healed that we are whole, and ready to run in God’s temple.

He heals perfectly and personally. But he also works to heal all. In the Gospel Jesus heals a Gentile far away from the Lord’s Temple. In this Lesson he heals (through Peter) a Jewish man at the Gate of the Temple. It doesn’t matter who or where – Jesus’ healing is for all. Who do you know who still needs his healing? Who can you look in the eye and say, “In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, be healed of your sin”? It’s for each individual. And his healing is for everyone.

Won’t it be nice to run in the temple of heaven, healed from sin and hell and death? You know, sometimes the anticipation of a wonderful even helps you wade through suffering in the present. Knowing Jesus heals your sins and that you will run in the temple – knowing that will help us through a lot of aches and pains and financial struggle and strained relationships.

But of course, we’d like healing from those hurts too, in the here and now. We’d like the healing of our sin to be joined by the healing of our much smaller, temporary struggles. But sometimes we think, “But God couldn’t care about my knee. What does he care about a promotion, or a son who won’t really talk to me anymore?” How silly – and completely wasteful and wrong and offensive to our heavenly Father.

Jesus is God. He took the time to take a man aside not only to heal his physical illness, but to do with personal care and attention. And from on high he cared to heal one man who could not walk. He has healed you from your sin. He cares about all your struggles. And he will heal them perfectly, whether it’s in this world or when you run into the temple. But know that he cares enough to do it now. It’s worth asking, in the spirit of our Savior, who prayed, “**Your will be done.**” Maybe he will choose to wait with the healing until you reach heaven, because he has a purpose for it until then. But we must ask him for the healing that is our will. We are righteous in Christ, and St. James says, **The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and active.** Ask for every kind of healing you need.

Do you know someone who needs healing of their sin? Look them in the eye and tell them it’s theirs in Jesus’ name. Do you know someone – including yourself – who needs any other kind of healing? Do what the folks in the Decapolis did, and bring them in prayer to Jesus for healing.

Thank you, dear Jesus, for healing us perfectly – body and soul. Amen.