

## Sunday 6<sup>th</sup> June 2021 – Acts 3:1-16 ‘A beautiful act at the Beautiful Gate’

It's that time of year when life is at its most abundant. In this week's daily inspirations I talked about the flowers (and, yes, weeds) pushing up through the cracks in our patio, but wherever you look, you can see it. Walking past the new ponds created by Standing Way there are two new broods of goslings being guarded by anxious parents (– you'll see them on our next hymn). There is cow parsley everywhere. The field by the railway line is once more a meadow of purple flowers. There are Chinese water deer in the new meadow area just by the big John Lewis warehouses, and pollinators hard at work everywhere. Life is flourishing.

This is the natural abundance of nature in our temperate climate. And it brings us joy. But it's easy to forget the source of this life – where it all comes from. Life is no accident. There are trillions and planets in the universe, but only this one has the abundance of life we're delighting in at present. You can tie yourself up in knots trying to play the odds and work out the probabilities – or we can just go back to today's passage and affirm a much simpler and more fundamental truth: **all life has an author, and this author is God.** Specifically God in the person of Jesus.

This is a famous story, and there is so much we could say about it: but I want to focus on this simple, striking phrase that Peter uses to describe God: the author of life. It might seem insignificant, just one of many ways we could think of God: but in fact, it's the key to the whole passage. When we think about God, naturally the first word we tend to use is 'love', and rightly so. But there's an equally important compatriot to 'love', and that is 'life'. God is irrepressibly *alive*: has been from eternity, and will be for all eternity. God's abundant life within himself flows out into what he creates: what God creates comes alive, and this life is able to perpetuate itself, such is the fullness of its life.

**We were made for life.** That might sound like a simple thing to say, but its consequences are profound. Heaven is real because we were made for life; Jesus came to rescue us because we were made for life; the Spirit acts in this world because we were made for life. God wants to share his life with all who would gladly share it with him.

When Peter describes God to his audience as the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, he is not just making the point that this is the same God who has now come in Christ, nor just that this God keeps his promises – though both of these great insights are true. He is also reminding us that God is the God who brings life, continuing that provision of life through the generations of his people.

It is no surprise then that the author of life – now at work in and through his followers – is able to do miraculous, life-giving things. God ultimately purposes to restore the whole of creation. The act of spontaneous healing we see in this story is a sign of this restoration of all things. There is a mystery to healing, as we know that this does not happen for everyone: but all the same, whenever it does happen, we can see the author of life marvellously at work.

And Peter is careful to emphasise that it's nothing to do with him. It's all God, and the glory goes to God. In fact, because the man is healed in the name of Jesus, it is Jesus who is glorified.

And this is important, because it reminds us that such healings are nothing to do with a technique, or even a special person – unlike other spiritual gifts like teachers or prophets, the New Testament does not refer to healers, only gifts of healing. In other words, any Christian can pray for this kind of stuff.

So why don't we? I think partly it's bad teaching – we have tended to pin this kind of thing on to particular 'gifted' people. It's partly a sense of unworthiness that we carry, so we don't feel we can ask God for this kind of thing – though it's important to notice that Peter feels exactly the same! It's partly a question of context: most healings like this occur in the context of mission, where faith is being contested. These miracles prove that what is said about Jesus is true. So we're more likely to see this kind of miracle in a situation where we're sharing our faith with someone.

But mostly, and tragically, too many of us have been raised to believe that God doesn't really do this kind of thing anymore. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the Western church has been poisoned by the idea that miracles don't happen in modern societies. Ironically at just the time that ministers and theologians started to preach this from the pulpits or write this in their books large sections of our society got interested in spiritualism instead – we didn't stop believing in spiritual experiences, people simply relocated their innate thirst for spiritual things somewhere unhealthy instead.

As I close, we need to practise discernment in knowing when to pray for healing like this. It's likely that Peter and John had encountered this man dozens of times before – after all, the text indicates that they went to the temple every day, and this man was there at the same gate every day. So why did they choose this day to pray for something spectacular? That, I think, is the prompting of God. Hence this strange phrase in the text which talks about Peter looking straight at the man: something – or Someone – nudged them to take a step of faith that day.

For us too, the questions not *whether* we should pray for miraculous healing sometimes, but knowing *when*. Let God prompt us – but if he does, and I believe that he will, we should be bold and take the same step of faith. **It's the same God, the same author of life. Jesus is still being glorified today.**

So let's take heart: you are made for life. And may God grant you grace to know that abundant life more and more, both in this world, and in glory. Amen.