

## **“Now It Is Time to Change Your Ways”**

Acts 3:12-19

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Today’s Scripture reading is a little difficult for us because we haven’t read a previous part of this story. This is how the early part of the story went:

As Peter and John entered the Temple for a prayer meeting, a man crippled from birth was sitting at the Temple gate begging for money from people. When he saw Peter and John about to enter the Temple, he asked for a handout. Peter said, "I don't have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, **WALK!**" He grabbed him by the right hand and pulled him up. In an instant his feet and ankles became firm. He jumped to his feet and walked. (Acts 3:1-8)

Peter, one of the disciples healed the lame man whose life is miserable, hopeless, in despair. This is the first reported resurrection “sign” that Jesus’ disciple, Peter, did in the name of Christ. What happened to this man? Now he is able to have a new beginning, hope and possibility for the future. He experienced a life changing event. He is able to walk! Life changing power! I believe this is the essence of the Easter story.

I have a story to share with you. A Jewish tailor in New York City had a son who graduated from college. He decided to send his son to Israel to learn about the Jewish culture. When he returned, his father asked him how it was. He said that the trip was fine, but he became a Christian. This upset his father. So he went to the Rabbi about this. The Rabbi told him that the same thing happened to his son. Both fathers decided to go to the synagogue and prayed to God about their situations. As they were praying, a voice came down from above and said, “You know, this also happened to me!”

Jesus Christ is the essence of Easter. He died for us but God raised him from the dead. Originally, Saturday was the Sabbath, but Christians rest on Sundays and worship God as a celebration. Do you know why? Because Jesus Christ rose on Sunday!

Jesus’ resurrection story is not a Greek myth that describes almighty God’s power to defeat death and evil. Rather it is a life changing power given to us to transform our lives. The Spirit of Easter is a mission oriented faith and

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movement for transformation of our lives, communities and the world.

Our Scripture reading begins with the temple audience's reaction to this miraculous event. Unfortunately, the crowd didn't focus on the restored man, but they were more interested in the supernatural power of the disciples. Peter addresses his people that God made this possible to heal the lame man and restore his life back for a fresh start. Please pay attention to Peter, especially, his confident speech to the people.

This morning, I want to focus on the disciple Peter's passion and mission as a witness of Jesus Christ. We know Peter well. He was a dishonest man, lacked faith and courage because he intentionally denied his master three times right before Jesus was going to die on the cross. But he was changed. Our reading shows us an image of Peter as a confident, passionate and enthusiastic disciple. Do you feel his energy, passion and confidence? Now he stands firm to challenge his people to believe in Jesus Christ. He said, "'Now it's time to change your ways! Turn to face God so he can wipe away your sins, pour out showers of blessing to refresh you, and send you the Messiah he prepared for you, namely, Jesus.'" In a different sense, his speech sounds like his own confession and testimony to me after he experienced the love of Christ for him.

Let me paraphrase his confession this way: "When I changed my way and humbly turned to God, in a mysterious way, I experienced God's healing touch on me. He wiped my tears, and took away my guilty feelings. And then I received a great blessing and peace to refresh me. Now I realize that Christ dwells in me." Today's Scripture is Peter's powerful faith statement. Do you have your own faith statement like Peter's?

Two years ago, I was asked to submit my faith statement about Jesus Christ before I was ordained. This passionate Peter's image is overlapped with my image when I presented my faith statement to the ordination committee. Here is my faith statement: "I believe in Jesus Christ, **Son of God** from the father God, **the God-given model** for my own life, **Redeemer** who took the sentence of death that I deserve, **Messiah** who saved my life, **liberator** from bondage and **my great friend**. Our invisible God is clearly manifested through Jesus Christ's life, death and resurrection. I am able to understand the essence of who God is through Jesus Christ. We turned away from God and our relationship was completely broken. We didn't make a bridge to reach back to God. The love of God in Jesus Christ comes to us to restore our broken relationship with God and others. The life and death of Jesus Christ are reminders of God's unlimited and gracious love for us. In our predicament, Jesus Christ came to us as the

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‘reconciliator.’ Through Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to God and we are able to be transformed into the children of God. Christians are Christ-like people.

When I was a Sunday school student, I didn’t understand why the almighty God would become vulnerable through suffering and death. (I knew that God could do everything but why?) I didn’t understand the meaning of God’s son’s suffering, death and resurrection. I came to realize that Jesus’ death on the cross was a sign of God’s love for me. **God is Love and the Son of God is the incarnation of love, a tangible experience of love in my life.** His love is not a passive love, but an active love reaching out to me and embracing everyone regardless of who they are. When we were under the power of evil, we were always tempted to fall into temptation and sin. Evil is active where God is not present. Jesus Christ invites us to join his ministry and his renewal movement against the power of Evil. I believe that we are called to transform this world by sharing God’s great love with our friends and neighbors who need the renewing love of God in Jesus Christ.”

Peter’s life was not passive but actively transformed people’s lives when he realized that he took Jesus as his Savior! He devoted his whole life for mission until he died. Mission oriented life to serve others is our Christian’s life. Christianity is a movement to renew our Spirit, proclaiming that we are all children of God whoever you are, and we are accountable for one another, our community and the world. This is the reason why God’s church exists and that’s why we are here as God’s people. The Easter story reminds us that God never stops working but continues to work through us. Our Fair Oaks Church is also called to do God’s work, mission and serve our community. When we lose our vitality of mission oriented spirit in our church, we will fail to generate new lives but only maintain our family. Please don’t forget our church mission statement that we are here to promote the love of Christ and nurture spiritual growth for each individual, the church and the community. Let us keep working on together! Amen.

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