

A Reflection

Third Sunday of Easter

Peter addressed the people, "You Israelites, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we had made him walk? The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and rejected in the presence of Pilate, though he had decided to release him. But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, his name itself has made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health in the presence of all of you. "And now, friends, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. In this way God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out."

Acts 3:12-19

This passage begins, really, in the middle of a an already unfolding story. We aren't sure how long after Jesus' death this story takes place, but probably a long while after. But one day, Peter and John are going up to the Temple in Jerusalem to pray when they encounter a man described as "lame." Because of his physical challenges he apparently cannot participate meaningfully in the society around him and so he is a beggar relying on the kindness of strangers. But Peter is somehow moved by what was surely a common experience and calls upon the name of Jesus to restore this man's place in life through giving him full health and use of his body.

And now in this passage he is talking to the people who saw or heard about what had happened and who are amazed and perplexed and maybe even a little afraid of it. And Jesus confronts their confusion and fear head on. "Why do you wonder at this?"

Why indeed. The story of God in history is a story of many amazing and wondrous things, that is as true for us as it was for that crowd that long ago day in Jerusalem. And Peter doesn't let up; reminding his fellow worshippers not only of God's enduring grace through time but also how Jesus was also an instrument of God's grace, an instrument that they had rejected out of fear and lack of faith.

It's important to remember that in this passage, we are not seeing a Christian talking to unbelievers, but rather a faithful servant speaking to his fellow servants. Everyone in this story is among the people of God. As Christians, we regularly and rightly focus a lot of our energy on those outside of the church. But Peter's words are a reminder to us that sometimes, we also need to maintain the order in our own house.

As God's people, we are not infallible, we are not special or better than others. We have been called and equipped to further God's mission of salvation. We are called to be instruments of God's grace to a hurting world in desperate need of love. But first we must learn to love each other within God's house. Because when we, like those ancient Israelites, become distracted by the fears and anxieties of

the world, then we too can lose sight of that divine calling and begin to work, unwittingly, for God's glory, but for its very opposite.