

Second Sunday of Easter, April 8, 2018, Year B

St. Andrew's Anglican Church – Douglas, GA

The Rev. Fr. John E. Commins+ - Rector

Scripture: John 20:19-31, Acts 3

"In the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth"

Did you ever go into your closet and say "hmmm – what am I going to wear today?" There is so much to choose from! My closet is a little different – I can choose from 'black,' 'black,' or 'black!" Believe it or not – I do have another section of other clothes. Sometimes it is the decision – what am I going to do – am I going to match this – am I going to wear my 'bulldogs shirt' or my Mets or Braves jersey? Whatever it might be – you have to make those choices. Today there are three very rich readings – which do I preach from? Do I share with you what happened in the Book of Acts? Do I take you to the Upper Room where Jesus appeared to the Apostles – and the door was locked? I struggled! So, I decided on both – because they both work together so beautifully.

Today's first reading from Acts chapter 3 takes place right after Peter and John were walking to the Temple, entering the gate called "Beautiful." There was a curved flight of fifteen steps, which climbed up to these magnificent doors. Historian Josephus described it as being covered with gold and silver. There were majestic bronze doors with extraordinary workmanship in Corinthian brass, huge and deserving of the label, beautiful. The real name of this gate was "the gate of Nicanor." It led to the court of the Gentiles and the women's court.

Please open your red pew Bibles to page 1693 – to the bottom of the page and Chapter 3 Verse 3. It was three in the afternoon, and there was a lame beggar – who was that way since birth, who was brought there every day so that he could beg from people entering the Temple. Look at verse 3: *"When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So, the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God."*

We need to understand just what Peter is asking the people in today's first reading. All of this took place before today's first reading. Today's reading is from Act chapter 3 beginning at verse 12. In exegeting this Scripture – we want to know what Peter and John did what they did. Who were they talking to? The man had just been healed and there was disbelief at what just happened – the healing of this lifelong cripple – who they saw every day asking for money – just to survive. Peter had no money but gave him a far greater gift – in the Name above all names – *"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."* He asked them: *"Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?"* (Acts 3:12) Peter then reminds them of Jesus – and the fact that they turned Him over to be crucified, even though Pilate wanted to let Jesus go. They killed the *"author of life"* – in other words – the Creator – who was raised from the dead- and now they cannot believe what was done in His Name! Jesus was foretold by the Prophets of God – and

they now stare in disbelief. Have you ever witnessed something – and you can't believe what you just saw? It could have been a car accident; it could have been a healing; it could have been something incredibly funny – sometimes you just have to say, 'did I just see what I just saw?' We have all been in situations like that. Now they just stare in disbelief. Just like when Jesus walked among them – He healed people by faith – He was doing the very same thing now through Peter, and He is still doing the same thing today – through us.

If you think about the awe that the people in the Temple area experienced that day – well, can you just imagine the stunned apostles in that locked room when all of a sudden, the Risen Jesus appeared to them and stood among them – He was there; the door was locked; how did He get there? And He offered them His Shalom – His peace? He showed them His hands and His feet – and they became overjoyed. Remember, John was there – he was an eyewitness. He was also there with Peter when Peter said, "*Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.*" John was an eyewitness! He writes "*Again Jesus said, "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you."*" (John 20:21) Jesus was changing their job description right before their very eyes. They had, for the most part, run and hid when Jesus was arrested right in front of them in the Garden of Gethsemane, and now, after hearing that Jesus was alive, leaving His empty tomb behind – He was once again right in front of them. Jesus knew how stunned they were and so He offered them His "shalom." His peace a second time.

Their minds must have raced – can you just imagine? I am sure they remembered the words that Jesus spoke to them in the Upper Room on the night of that Seder Meal, the Last Supper – some of the last words He shared with them. Jesus told them "*Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.*" (John 16:22) What /he said on that night was now coming true. So much more was in store for them, but Jesus was not just "sending them" to continue His ministry – but He was about to empower them as well! Jesus was about to give them the gift of the Holy Spirit – to enrich their own spirits – to allow them to do more than they have ever done before. The Hebrew word for breath or spirit is "ruach." Jesus shared His Spirit, His breath with them "*And with that he breathed on them and said, "Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive anyone his sins, they are forgiven; if you do not forgive them, they are not forgiven."*" (John 20:22-23) The same word for breath is the same word for spirit. Jesus breathed His Spirit of new life into the Apostles that day – just as He had done in creation: "*the LORD God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.*" (Genesis 2:7)

Are you seeing the connection here? The Apostles received the breath – the "ruach ha Kadesh" "ha Kadesh" means "the holy" – the holy breath, the Holy Spirit of God – and they received all they needed to carry out the command that Jesus gave them – the power to forgive sins – and everything that goes along with it. In essence, Jesus was telling them that He believed that they were up to the job – stop doubting; stop hiding; stop being afraid; and get up and start doing

what I called you to do - to continue the ministry that He, the Messiah, had begun. They would receive more in less than 45 days – on the day of Pentecost, when they received the full gifts of the Holy Spirit as a rushing wind, but for now Jesus was telling them to come out of hiding and to begin the work that was needed to be done.

I have preached countless times about the event a week later when Jesus came back to share His peace once again – but to meet with Thomas – to erase any fear or doubt that Jesus really did come to see them. You heard the Gospel reading – how Jesus went right to Thomas and Thomas' reaction was to say, "*My Lord, and my God.*" (John 20:28) He didn't just say 'Oh Jesus, nice to see you' – or 'Oh my Lord, Adonai' – He called Him God, and he was the first disciple – the first apostle to do that.

We know that Jesus ascended to the Father 40 days after Passover, and the Holy Spirit descended upon and gifted the apostles on Pentecost – 50 days after Passover, but we don't know when it was the Peter and John ascended the steps to the Temple – resulting in the healing of the cripple. We know that it was sometime after Pentecost, since Luke recorded this event in chapter 3, and the day of Pentecost – is chapter 2 of the book of Acts. We know that on Pentecost, all of the Apostles were emboldened – to go out into the city proclaiming the truth about Jesus in many languages – or tongues. Peter was given the courage and strength to preach about Jesus to the crowd that day – Acts 2:41 says "*Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day.*" We had trouble fitting 125 in this church last Sunday – can you imagine speaking to more than 3,000 people and having 3,000 come to Christ that day – and asking to be baptized? Oh my goodness!

There was quite a difference in the Apostles from the men who hid in the upper room for fear of being caught by the Jewish leadership to the way that they were now professing the risen Jesus to the world. "*Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles.*" (Acts 2:43) The peace and courage that Jesus breathed upon them, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost were indeed empowering them to continue doing what Jesus did – as was evident on the day that Peter and John went to the Temple. Following the healing of this man, the Temple leaders were upset. Can you imagine? Here was Peter who said, "*In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.*" It got so bad that the Temple leadership arrested them. They were astonished in the change in these men – and asked them how the man had been healed? Peter told them "*by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*" He convicted them of killing Jesus – and they told Peter and John not to mention that Name – and they would go free. Peter told them: "*Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.*" (Acts 4:12) Thank you Lord, that they did not follow those instructions – but instead followed the words of Jesus that He spoke to them as recorded in Acts 1:8 "*But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.*"

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Christians must remember the power that comes in the Name above all Names, and that is why when we pray, especially for others we do so in the Name of Jesus. Remember the power that came in Peter's words: "*Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.*" (Acts 3:6)