



LIVING WORD EPISCOPAL CHURCH

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In the Name of the Messiah

Acts 3

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So what happens after Pentecost? In the church's calendar we spend the first half of the year walking through the life of Jesus—maybe we think of that as the “gospel story”—and that closes with Pentecost. And in the second half of the year we focus on the life of the church as it lives out Pentecost. But the way the lectionary does that tends to present the life of the church in the abstract. That's not necessarily bad. But the book of Acts gives us an opportunity to see it in real life, in history. And Acts is important because it makes sure we understand that the life of the church isn't some application of abstract theological principles. Acts shows us the life of the church as very much the continuation of the story of Jesus, of that gospel narrative. It doesn't end with the Ascension. It doesn't end with Pentecost. Pentecost simply begins a new chapter. As Luke said at the beginning, in the gospel he wrote he laid out what Jesus *began* to do and to teach. In Acts we see Jesus continuing to do and to teach, but now it's through his church, through his people.

So last week we saw this amazing move of the Spirit. That's how I think we mostly think of it: a move of the Spirit. But if we've been following the story through Easter and the ascension it ought to be clear that Pentecost is, first and foremost, *a move of Jesus the Messiah*. Having taken his heavenly throne to reign as king until he has put all his enemies under his feet, Jesus has sent the Spirit to enact, to make real the truth of his reign *through the church*. The spirit enables the apostles, the rest of the

disciples, enables *us* to put off the old, lie-based, rebellious way of being human and to put on the new humanity brought by Jesus' resurrection from the dead. The Spirit makes us the working model of God's new creation in the midst of the old. The Spirit, living within us, make us God's new temple: full of his presence, his wisdom, his gospel. And as we fulfil his original command to are fruitful and multiply, we grow and spread that temple until God's glory fills the earth.

So Pentecost doesn't stand alone. It's not just a stage in our personal spiritual growth. It's not even for our own benefit. It's to carry the reign of Jesus as Lord to the world. So, again, what happens after Pentecost? Look at Acts, Chapter 3. [Page 1082 in the pew Bibles.] Luke tells us, “Peter and John were going up to the temple at three o'clock in the afternoon, the time for prayer.”

I think it's worth a pause there. Peter and John and the rest of the church had become the new temple. The very thing that was missing from old, bricks-and-mortar temple, the presence of God, had come to dwell in them. But they still went to the old bricks-and-mortar temple. It highlights the fact that they didn't think of Jesus, the Spirit, the new covenant, being the new Israel as being some kind of new religion. This new thing was simply how to be a faithful Jew in light of God's promises to Israel being fulfilled in Jesus. And so these first Christians continued to observe *torah*, they worshipped with their fellow Jews in the synagogues, and they went with their fellow Jews to pray in the temple. They didn't leave Judaism for something called Christianity. But here's the thing: You and I don't do any of those things. We don't live according to *torah*, we're not circumcised, we don't observe the Jewish feasts, we don't go to the temple—we can't, because God judged and destroyed it long ago—but we are part of that same family of Jesus people, that same new Israel,

that same church. Because the new Israel isn't about *torah*, or circumcision, or diet, or Sabbath, or biological descent from Abraham. It's about faith in, allegiance to Jesus, Israel's Messiah, and his kingdom, and the law of love written in our hearts by his Spirit. What marks us out is our baptism into Jesus and the law of the Spirit that overflows from within us.

Now, Luke goes on: “There was a man being carried in who had been lame from his mother's womb. People used to bring him every day to the temple gate called “Beautiful”, so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John going into the temple, he asked them to give him some money.

So every day, probably for many years, this man's friends would carry him to the gate of the main temple court and leave him there to beg. He was a fixture of the temple. Few people probably “knew” him, but everyone was familiar with him. Peter and John weren't from Jerusalem, but they'd probably seen the man when they visited the temple. Maybe they'd given him money before. But this time they have no money. They'd left their jobs as fisherman in Galilee. The church in Jerusalem has been surviving by living as family, pooling their resources. Luke goes on: “Peter, with John, looked hard at him. ‘Look at us,’ he said. The man stared at them, expecting to get something from them. ‘I haven't got any silver or gold,’ Peter said, ‘but I'll give you what I have got. In the name of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk!’ He grabbed the man by his right hand and lifted him up. At once his feet and ankles became strong, and he leaped to his feet and began to walk. He went in with them into the temple, walking and jumping up and down and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognised him as the man who had been sitting begging for alms by the Beautiful Gate of the temple. They were filled with

amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him.”

He got more than he bargained for and what Peter and John give this man is right in keeping with what we read at the end of Chapter 2. Money had ceased to have any importance for the disciples. Something far better had come along. Money is one of those things you need to get along in the old age where things are scarce and people are greedy. The kingdom of God is about his new creation generosity and abundance. This is why they lived like a family and shared what God gave with each other. It was a practical way to live out new creation in way that confronted the scarcity and greed of the old age. They knew there was something more important, a new power, a new kind of life—something far more important than silver and gold and so they gave it to this man. The man didn’t even ask to be healed. He’d probably given up on that idea years and years ago. But Peter gave this man new creation in the name of Jesus.

Maybe this is why Peter insisted that the man look at them. Picture Peter looking hard into the lame man’s eyes and the lame man staring back. Maybe Peter had seen Jesus do that: looking intently into the eyes of hurting people, seeing desperation, seeing hopelessness in some and faith in others. Making a connection. Sharing the compassion of God for the victims of the corrupt principalities and powers of the present age. It seems like Peter saw something there. Maybe hope. Maybe faith. Maybe the man knew who Peter was. Maybe he’d heard about what happened at Pentecost. Peter saw something. And he didn’t just tell the man to get up and walk. That’s what Jesus would have done and Peter wasn’t Jesus. Peter had no power of his own to do anything. Instead, Peter made it clear where the power lies: “In the name of the Messiah, Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk.”

The name is as good as the person. Peter and John were acting as Jesus’ representatives and in that capacity—so long as they were faithful to Jesus’ will, his desire, his agenda, his rule and kingdom—they could act with power and authority and faith on his behalf—in his name. And so can we. Sometimes we forget that. On the one hand, we pray and we add something like “through Jesus our Lord” or “in the name of Jesus” at the end of our prayers without even thinking about what it means or, on the other hand, we use Jesus’ name as if it were a talisman to give our prayers legitimacy or as if just mentioning the name of Jesus will bring *our* will into reality. I once prayed and when I was done, a guy came up to me afterward and said, “You didn’t say ‘in Jesus’ name’ so your prayer won’t come true.” No. Brothers and Sisters, saying a prayer isn’t like making a wish and adding Jesus’ name doesn’t validate our prayers. Whether we mention him or not, every true Christian prayer is offered to the Father through the mediation of Jesus the son. It is through him that we have access to God. And God answers our prayer not because we add a name, but because our whole prayer is a cry for his new creation to become reality, for it to be on earth as it is heaven. Too often our prayers are veiled appeals to our old idols, appeals to the principalities and powers, appeals still subject to the fears and anxieties of the present evil age, outgrowths of the flesh rather than the Spirit. And to those prayers, God answers “No”. Brothers and Sisters, to pray in Jesus’ name is to submit ourselves to the goodness and faithfulness of God; it is to pray with faithfulness and single-hearted loyalty to him as Lord, and to ask not for our will to be done, but his; to ask not for the fulfilment of our vision of the good, but his; to ask not for our kingdom to be made real, but his kingdom. It is to understand that heaven is the storehouse of the goodness of God’s kingdom, like the turkey in the refrigerator and the presents stored up under Mom and

Dad’s bed, all to be brought out when Christmas comes. God’s kingdom will come in all its fulness when the church, when we have made God’s gospel known throughout the earth and when the knowledge of his glory covers creation as the sea. Prayer is to ask God to give us glimpse of that final day when the presents are under the tree, ready to be opened, and the turkey is on the table and the great feast is ready. Prayer is, to quote Karl Barth, “the beginning of an uprising against the disorder the world.” It is to ask in hope for God’s justice, God’s righteousness, God’s goodness, God’s faithfulness, God’s future to be known—even if only in a small way—right here and right now.

And that’s what Peter did. And suddenly the man was jumping and dancing his way into the temple full of heaven on earth. And everyone noticed. Verse 11: “All the people ran together in astonishment towards Peter and John and the man was clinging to them. They were in the part of the temple known as ‘Solomon’s Porch’. Peter saw them all and began to speak. ‘Men of Israel,’ he said, ‘why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us as though it was our own power or piety that made this man walk? “The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob—the God of our fathers”—he has glorified his servant Jesus, the one you handed over and denied in the presence of Pilate, although he had decided to let him go.”

Let’s pause there. When Peter says “the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob—the God of our fathers” he’s taking a line from Exodus 3. This is how the God of Israel introduced himself to Moses at the burning bush before sending him back to Egypt to demand that Pharaoh let the Israelites go. Jesus had just done this in his dispute with the Sadducees and now Peter does the same and his point is to highlight that just as with Moses and the Exodus from Egypt, the God of Israel is at

work here and not just as work, but at work to bring his promises to Israel to pass. Peter's announcing that it's happening again. In Jesus and the Spirit; in Good Friday and Easter and Ascension and Pentecost, the God of Israel was acting once again to deliver his people from bondage, to lead them in a new exodus, to renew his covenant.

We'll see this throughout Acts. Confronted by Jesus and his mighty deeds, those early believers would go back to Exodus. That was when God fulfilled his promises to deliver his people. That was when they sacrificed the Passover lambs. That was when he led them through the sea and gave them his law. That was when he led them into the promised land and gave them an inheritance. And when those first Christians saw Jesus and the Spirit at work it was like Moses at the burning bush seeing something amazing that he couldn't explain, and with that scene in mind, we ought to be expecting that God is still keeping his promises and is doing something extraordinary again.

Peter goes on: "You denied the holy one, the just one, and requested instead to have a murderer given to you; and so you killed the Prince of Life. But God raised him from the dead, and we are witnesses to the fact. And it is his name, working through faith in his name, that has given strength to this man, whom you see and know. It is faith which comes through him that has given him this new complete wholeness in front of all of you."

So Peter starts explaining Jesus by pulling images from the Jewish scriptures. We might miss it because we don't know the Bible as well as we should; the people there that day definitely would not have. First, Peter calls Jesus the servant of God. Second, he stresses the innocence of Jesus. He wasn't deserving of death, but the people of Jerusalem handed him over to Pilate. Even Pilate, Peter

says, knew Jesus was innocent. But they demanded Pilate release Barabbas and that Jesus be crucified. These images together draw on Isaiah's prophecy, especially Isaiah 53, the passage about the suffering servant, an innocent, who would one day, go to the slaughter like a lamb for the sins of the people. When Peter calls him the holy one, this too brings up images of the suffering servant and of the spotless lamb. If the people want to understand what's happened to the lame man, how he's been healed, Peter is saying that they need to think about the Exodus and they need to be thinking about Isaiah's suffering servant and understand that Jesus is standing at the centre of both of these images from Israel's story and God's promises.

And this is why he calls Jesus the "Prince of Life". The *archegos*, not just prince, but also the author, the origin, the source of life. Jesus is the sovereign one, the Lord, who brings life. It fits with John's image of the word, who was in the beginning and through whom, as God spoke him out, was the source of everything. Through him all things were created and now, through the word, God speaks life into the world again. He came into the midst of corruption and sickness and death and has brought life. And wherever he goes he brings life and in that life he announces his lordship, his sovereignty, his kingdom. Wherever he brings life he announces his victory over sin and death, over the present evil age. Wherever he brings life, he announces the hope of God's promises fulfilled and a world set to rights: no more death, no more sorrow, no more tears. Ironically, his own people rejected and killed him, but God raised him from the dead to prove that Jesus is the life of the world and because of that we know, we have confidence that his life will continue to go out into the world.

Peter does here what he did at Pentecost. God did something mighty and amazing, and Peter—steeped in

scripture and full of the Spirit—explains what's going on in light of the story of Israel and her God and, most importantly, showing how what's now happening is the fulfilment of what God had promised to his people. That's the biggest thing here. This is no faith healer, doing theatrics and putting the spotlight on himself. Peter has absolutely no interest in that. He makes it clear: this is all about Jesus. The prophets had said that the world would be set to rights when the knowledge of the glory of God has covered it as the sea. Not the knowledge of Peter. Not the knowledge of celebrity apostles. The knowledge of the glory of God. And so Peter's Spirit-filled purpose is to proclaim the glory of God—to make sure everyone knows not just that God is mighty and powerful, but that God is above all faithful to his promises and worthy of our trust, worthy of our allegiance, worthy of our faith. And that's the next thing. After announcing how this is healing is evidence of God's faithfulness, Peter issues a call to faith. Look at verse 17:

"Now, Brothers," Peter continued, "I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your rulers did. But this is how God has fulfilled what he promised through the mouth of all the prophets, that his Messiah would suffer. So now repent, and turn back, so that your sins may be blotted out, so that times of refreshment may come from the presence of the Lord, and so that he will send you Jesus, the one he chose and appointed to be his Messiah. He must be received in heaven, you see, until the time which God spoke about through the mouth of the holy prophets from ancient days, the time when God will restore all things. Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me, one from among your own brothers; whatever he says to you, you must pay attention to him. And everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be cut off from the people.' All the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and his successors, spoke

about these days too. You are the children of the prophets, the children of the covenant which God established with your ancestors when he said to Abraham, 'In your seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' When God raised up his servant he sent him to you first, to bless you by turning each of you away from your wicked deeds."

Over and over Peter stresses that what the people are seeing is the fulfilment of God's promises going all the way back to Abraham: His promise to renew fallen Israel, his promise to reach out to the nations with this glory through this renewed people. Peter points forward to this hope of creation set to rights that we see from this point on throughout Acts and the New Testament, said in various ways. God will "sum up all things in the Messiah," as we heard Paul say in Ephesians 1:10. Through the Messiah he will "reconcile all things to himself, making peace by his blood, shed on the cross" (Colossians 1:20). He will make "new heavens and new earth, in which justice will dwell" (Revelation 21:1). He will overcome every power which destroys and corrupts his good creation, so that eventually God will be "all in all" (1 Corinthians 15:28). The whole creation will be "set free from its slavery to decay, to share the liberty of the glory of God's children" (Romans 8:21). Brothers and Sisters, it began at the cross and the empty tomb, the ascension was a sign it was all true, and Pentecost show us that we're not only a part of how these promises will be fulfilled, but we can watch as heaven invades earth with the glory of God. We don't have to wait for some distant day to see God revealed. We see his glory at work each day: in ourselves as his word and Spirit renew us and in the world as we live and proclaim the good news about Jesus and see faith born in others and their hearts and minds renewed by Jesus and the Spirit. We see God's glory revealed as the weight of sin and guilt is lifted. Notice that's part of Peter's message. It's not just a call to

repent. It's also assurance of forgiveness. God, through the blood of Jesus, was ready to forgive even the rejection, the hardness of heart, the rebellion of Israel when they crucified Jesus. That's the whole point of all of this: God's great final restoration of all things is for us, for sinners, for rebels, for God-haters, right here and right now. The gospel brings God's future into the present, because God longs to show his mercy and his grace to sinners. As God longs for his good world that we've corrupted with our sin to be set to rights, even more he longs to set us to rights that we might once again be the stewards, the priests of his temple that he created us to be.

God will, as Peter says echoing Isaiah 43:25, God will blot out the sins of those who repent. And if his grace was big enough and Jesus' blood strong enough to blot out the sins of those who crucified him, and his Spirit powerful enough to renew their hearts and to fill them with love, Brothers and Sisters, the blood of Jesus and the renewing power of his Spirit is enough to bring God's new creation to us. Repent and believe in the name of Jesus. Be forgiven. Be made whole. Be made new. Be refreshed. Be God's future here and now. Be made a witness to your family, to your friends, to everyone around you of the saving power of Jesus the Messiah.

Let's pray: O God, the strength of all who put their trust in you: Mercifully accept our prayers; and because in our weakness we can do nothing good without you, give us the help of your grace, that in keeping your commandments we may please you both in will and deed; through Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, for ever and ever. *Amen.*