

Acts 3:1-10 (1984 NIV)
Making a Difference in Jesus' Name

Introduction

A friend of mine used to be a bully in school. The students were intimidated by him and the teachers were exasperated by him.

One time, he was disciplined by his class teacher and asked to do 20 push-ups. He completed that easily ... and continued on and on and on, ignoring the teacher's instruction to stop. So the whole time when the teacher was teaching in class, he was doing his push-ups. It is as if he was trying to prove that he was tougher than the discipline meted on him.

Another time, he and his gang went to the cemetery grounds and dug up some graves as part of their pranks.

Yet another time, his class teacher led the class to a hike into the MacRitchie Reservoir. Unfortunately, someone kicked a hornets' nest somewhere along the way. Immediately, the hornets struck back with a vengeance. They chased and swarmed the hikers. Many were stung and screaming in panic and pain.

As the swarm of hornets were about to attack a group of fallen students, the teacher ran forward, threw his own body on top of the students, and covered them from the hornets with it.

When the attack was over, he was seriously wounded and poisoned by the merciless stings. He and others were eventually sent to the hospital. But it was too late for him. He died of his sting wounds.

At the Christian funeral service, my bully friend was touched by the self sacrifice of his late teacher. And he heard of Jesus' self-sacrificing love for mankind—He laid down His life that sinners might live. At the same time, this friend was amazed at the great sense of hope and peace he saw in the bereaved family even in the face of such a sudden and tragic loss. My friend gave His life to Jesus that day. The late teacher did not die in vain—he had made a difference in Jesus' name.

This friend of mine changed almost overnight. He would no longer bully other students or exasperate the teachers. Rather, he was on fire with a different purpose—he was calling people to believe in Jesus. Many fellow students turned to Christ because of his witness and testimony—he

started a revival of sorts in the school. He turned from a scary bully to a shining beacon, and made a difference in Jesus' name.

He and some of the classmates whom he had led to Christ started an evangelistic ministry almost immediately when they left school. And they are still at it even until today. They want to continue to make a difference in Jesus' name.

Our text today shows us a day in the life of the apostles Peter and John during the early beginning of the young church. It was a day when lives were touched by the grace and power of the Lord. It has lessons for us on what it means to make a difference in Jesus' name.

I. Acts 3:1-5

We are told that “one day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon” (v. 1).

It was an ordinary day when Peter and John were just doing the routine. They were Christians and they were Jews too. And early Christians like them were still practicing some of their Jewish customs. One of the things they did daily and routinely was to meet in the temple courts for prayer and worship (2:46-47).

And on that one day, when they went about their daily and routine religious devotions, the Lord worked in an amazing way. The Lord was at work even on a seemingly ordinary day.

What happened? “A man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put there every day to beg from those going into the temple courts” (v. 2).

There was this beggar crippled from birth—this is Luke's way of saying that he was not only crippled for a very long time, but also there was almost no chance at all of he getting healed.

Every day, his friends would carry him to the Beautiful Gate to beg for money. And this day he was there again—just like any other day when the routines were supposed to run their usual course. But the sad bit about letting things become routine is that we not only don't expect to see beyond the ordinary, but we also become indifferent to our status quo.

Notice that the beggar was always placed at the Beautiful Gate. He was not allowed to be carried into the temple courts to pray and worship God with his fellow Jews. Why? In Jewish society, he was marginalized as “unclean” because of his physical handicap. He was at the Beautiful Gate day in and day out, yet

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never able to move an inch into the temple ground. How could this gate be beautiful to him? It was a gate that shut him out from the worship of God. He was there day in and day out, but nobody (including himself) was concerned about his deep spiritual alienation and helplessness.

This is “Indifference” with a capital “I”. But indifference is not just unconcerned about something. More dangerously, it is the wrong concern about the minor thing and not the major one.

Today is like any other Sunday. We come to church and we expect things to run smoothly as usual. We expect the mike to work, the bulletins to be there, and the lights and air-condition to come on. Some people are getting these done. But who are they? Maybe you say, “I don’t know and I don’t really care.” That’s how the routine of religion can breed indifference—there’s a certain apathy that distances us from people and even from God.

I am sure those who serve are not craving for praise and adulation. But for us who enjoy the blessing of their service Sunday in and Sunday out, we do well not to let the experience of ordinary routines to make us indifferent. Let’s not be too slow to say and do something that will encourage one another to walk another mile in the Lord.

Even if the mike is not working well today, do not ask, “Why is the mike not working?”—that’s complaining. Rather ask, “How can I help to make sure it works the next time?”—that’s complementing.

Some of you have been enjoying your parents’ care and concern week in and week out. They ferry you to and from school, they give you your pocket money, they invest to help you do your best in your studies (from getting the best tutor to the best computer), they take you holidays overseas, etc. All these have become a part of the ordinary experiences in your life.

But don’t become indifferent. Say and do something to encourage and strengthen your parents to continue doing not only with love for you, but more importantly, with love for God.

The beggar was left at the temple’s gate day in and day out. He was such a usual and ordinary sight that no one took pity or much notice of him anymore. He too had the same apathy towards himself—“I am like that for so long. No more hope already.”

That day he saw Peter and John about to enter into the temple. He asked them for money. It was like any other day. He likely had seen Peter and John on many previous occasions. The apostles probably had walked past him on many occasions. That day, their paths crossed again and the beggar called out to them.

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Have you noticed what happens to people when students with donation tins approach them on Saturday mornings at the MRT stations? Many of them would just look and walk away without giving anything. Some would stop, dip into their pockets or wallets for some coins, and drop them into the tins. Even then, they hardly look at the students.

But when the beggar called out to Peter and John that day, they responded in a very special way—they looked straight at him with Peter saying, “Look at us!” (v. 4). The apostles wanted the beggar’s full attention. Perhaps after calling on Peter and John, this man was busy eyeing around for other people to ask for money. Peter told him, “Stop being distracted. Look at us!” The man “gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them” (v. 5). And something amazing would soon happen on this ordinary day.

But what is Scripture trying to show us here, when Peter responded to the call of a beggar for money on an ordinary day by asking him to look at him?

It is this: *Expect God to work even on an ordinary day by not only seeing a divine opportunity, but also seizing that opportunity to make a difference in Jesus’ name.*

On that seemingly ordinary day, Peter and John reckoned it as a divine opportunity in God’s time. They seized it to make a difference in Jesus’ name in the beggar’s life.

Today is like any ordinary Sunday. Do you expect God to work? Some of you may want to sound spiritual. You say, “Today is Sunday. I don’t expect God to work because the Bible says He rested on the 7th day.”

But that’s only in the Genesis creation account☺ Indeed, God is working today. We are to expectantly discern His working, and rest in Him using us to do what He wants done today.

Make a difference in Jesus’ name. What does it mean for us today? Expect God to work even on an ordinary day—see the opportunity and seize it to do something to glorify His name. It is all about active obedience today and every day, and not passive indifference.

Moving on ...

II. Acts 3:6-10

Peter looked at the beggar and uttered these words, “Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk” (v. 6).

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The beggar asked for money. Peter and John might not have silver and gold ingots. But surely, they must have some coins with them.

It is not unreasonable for the beggar to ask for money in view of his circumstances. But Peter and John saw his deeper need. It is not money, but a miracle—to move from where he was to where God wanted him to be.

To the beggar, economic survival was paramount. Peter and John told him that God had an even more important priority for him. Similarly, the voices in our society today keep drumming into our ears of the priority of economics.

The local newspapers once ran a story of a 29-year-old woman who died suddenly of suspected pulmonary embolism caused by deep vein thrombosis. It means she died of breathing difficulties resulting from a blood clot that had choked one of her lungs. The reason for this is that she had been sitting still working marathon on her computer with little movement of her body but lots of stress on it. Two days before she died, she wrote this in her blog, “I really thought I was able to do everything, that I can be supergirl as well, but my health is worsening at a fast rate. Vitamin M isn’t gonna cure my health.”

(<https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/vitamin-m-wont-cure-my-health>)

But we live in a society where in the name of economic survival, ethical practices can be thrown away and unethical values can be tolerated. But in God’s scheme of things, economics is often not His primary and sole concern for us.

Peter and John could have given the beggar some loose change and that would have made him very happy. But that would not make any difference in his life. That would not have moved him from where he was to where God wanted him to be.

Peter and John led the beggar to receive something even better—they gave him an experience of divine power in the name of Jesus. He was healed of his handicap.

“Taking him by the right hand, he (Peter) helped him up, and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk” (vv. 7-8).

The beggar did not begin to walk with a limp or with unsteady steps. Scripture tells us that he jumped to his feet and walked—that’s Luke’s way of saying that he’s completely healed. He could walk for the first time in his life—something not all the money in the world could do for him. Immediately, he realized that he

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needed God and not gold; that he needed to place his faith in God and not in mammon.

How do I know that? Notice what he did when he was healed. He did not move away from the temple and use his newly found mobility to do something else that would earn him more money. Rather, he went with Peter and John “into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God” (v. 8).

Remember, he was considered spiritually unclean and so could not enter the temple courts to worship God with his fellow Jews. If Peter and John had only given him some loose change, he would still be crippled, and the Beautiful Gate would still be a gate that shut him out from worshipping God. But because Peter and John gave him an experience of divine power in the name of Jesus, he was healed, and the gate became a door that led him into the temple courts where he could worship his God for the first time in his life. He was healed not only physically but spiritually—he was physically restored and spiritually cleansed. That’s the amazing difference that Peter and John made in his life in the name of Jesus.

And in turn, this healed man made a tremendous impact on those who were in the temple. They “saw him walking and praising God ... they recognized him ... they were filled with wonder and amazement” (vv. 9-10).

This man was not only a praising worshipper of the Lord, but also a powerful witness of the Lord. And through his witness, the way was opened for Peter to preach his second sermon since Pentecost (Acts 3:11)

What do we learn from Peter and John here about making a difference in Jesus’ name? They could have easily given the man some loose change. But that would still leave him in his crippled condition at the Beautiful Gate—i.e. where he was all his life as a spiritually marginalized Jew.

But Peter and John chose to take another option. They took the risk and exercised faith in healing the cripple in Jesus’ name. The crippled was healed completely, and he went into where God wanted him to be—for the first time in his life he not only walked, but he walked into the temple courts to be a worshipper and witness of the true God. What a difference! What an impact!

Have you ever wondered how an eagle learns to soar? I read that a mother eagle would build her nest high up on the face of a cliff overlooking the sea. In this nest the eagle chicks are hatched and spend their first days watching their mother come and go, collecting food and bringing it back.

One day mummy eagle decides it's time her chicks learn to fly. You know how she does it? She goes into the nest where her chicks are, and then pushes them out. The chicks start plummeting down the cliff-face terrified, shocked, and aware that death is just seconds away. And then something amazing happens. The chicks instinctively flap and stretch their wings; the plummet becomes a fall and then a gentle rise. Soon the chicks are soaring like their mother!

It's in that terrifying moment that the chicks discover what they are capable of doing. Without that terrifying moment they will never have learnt to soar.

In the same way, God sometimes pushes us into humanly difficult situations so that we can know what we can do and the difference we can make with the God-given potential in us. In other words, we learn to soar like an eagle when we obey and do that difficult thing in His power and in His name.

(<https://storiesforpreaching.com.au/sermonillustrations/teaching-eaglets-to-fly>)

What do we learn from Peter and John here about making a difference in Jesus' name? It is this: *We can make a difference in Jesus' name when we trust God enough to do the humanly difficult thing—the IMPOSSIBLE becomes I'M POSSIBLE in God!*

We can indeed make a difference within and without the Body of Christ by doing the humanly difficult thing from time to time—e.g. remove our pretence and share our struggle, speak the truth in love to one another.

Conclusion

Between today and next Sunday, will it still be another ordinary week for you? Even if it is, remember that God is still at work. Make a difference in Jesus' name in where God has placed you—see and seize the divine opportunities, get out of your comfort zone, trust God enough to help and use you to do even the humanly difficult thing.

Some ways you can do that:

- One, value where you are. When we go through hard times, it is encouraging to know the biblical promise that “this too shall pass” (2 Cor 4:17-18). What we may not want to hear is that this also applies to the good times in life—i.e. the good times too shall pass. So, let's learn to make the best of things in life as they come.

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- Two, don't be afraid to take some risk. A life with no risks is a dull life. Of course we shouldn't take risks that we know for sure would jeopardize our life or the lives of others. However, we need to breakout of our safe and comfort zone now and then, and do something different as the Lord so leads us.
- Three, invest in the people God has placed in your life. Whether they're your children, spouse, relatives, co-workers, friends or church family, give them your time and attention as opportunities arise. Smile, laugh, cry and share your life with them. Make sweet memories with people, even the challenging ones, while you can.

You and I can make a difference in Jesus' name. The Lord is waiting and rallying, and may He find us willing and ready.