

THE FOLLOWING IS THE SCRIPT THAT PASTOR STEVE USED TO PREACH FROM. IT IS NOT WRITTEN FOR PUBLICATION, AND MAY CONTAIN TYPOS AND/OR GRAMMATICAL ERRORS. IT MAY ALSO DIFFER SLIGHTLY FROM THE RECORDED SERMON.

Sermon 15 May 2022

Title: The Rising Church Sermon 4: From Down and Out to Up and In

(Acts 3:1-11)

- Good morning church family, it is always a blessing to have you with us—and it is our prayer that you are UPlifted and INspired by what you see and hear with us this morning
- Now I want to begin by saying a heartfelt thank-you to our LargsNaz church family for making our friends Bryce and Aubrey feel so welcomed during their visit with us—they told us before they left on Wednesday of this week how much they enjoyed our First Friday gathering and our Sunday Brunch and how all of you made them feel just like family—and we certainly had a good visit with them—I tell ya, I put on about 10 pounds while they were here, so you know I had a good time—but it is a good thing to have a time of feasting and celebration, and it is also good to get back on schedule and have a little discipline—but we didn't JUST eat, we did get some exercise as well-- you know last Sunday after church Pastor Tasha and Aubrey and Bryce and I walked up behind Douglas Park—we saw that neolithic tomb that's there, and we walked on up and up and up, and when we got all the way up to where that stairway is that leads to the viewpoint at the very top, we took a little break and sat on a bench that's there—I figured the three of them could use the rest since they're not in prime physical condition like I am, and so we

sat on that bench for a while and had a little snack—because you know if Tasha is with us, she’s gonna bring snacks—so we had a little bite to eat and then Bryce and I decided that we would climb those stairs—there are 211 of them, and get up to that viewpoint at the very top of that hill—Tasha and Aubrey weren’t interested, but me and Bryce we climbed all the way up and when we got to the top we gave each other a high five and we walked around up there for a while and we took some pictures of that beautiful view—and as we were looking out I noticed Pastor Tasha and Aubrey headed back down the hill—I wondered where they were going and wanted to make sure everything was alright, so I yelled as loud as I could—Hey! Where ya’ll goin’?! Hey!! And at first they didn’t stop or turn around so I figured they couldn’t hear me—I mean they were several hundred feet away down below so I yelled again a little louder and Bryce yelled too and we waved our arms—Hey where y’all going? Is everything alright? And this time they did turn around and look up at us but they didn’t say anything, they just turned around and walked on—and so I thought they probably got thirsty or needed to find the restroom or something, and I was just about to yell again but about that time, Bryce kinda punched me on the arm and he said “Look over there” and he pointed down to the bench where we had all been sitting, and there was Tasha and Aubrey, still sitting there—and it took a minute for me to figure out what was going on—but just let me say this—if you and somebody else were hiking up behind Douglas Park last Sunday afternoon and you got shouted at by what appeared to be two complete lunatics up at

the viewpoint on the top of the hill, I sincerely apologise for any distress we may have caused, but we honestly thought you were somebody else—and now you know why I wear these glasses when I want to see anything that's more than about 10 feet away from me.

- But visual impairment and mistaken identities notwithstanding, this is Week 4 of our Rising Church sermon series—and during these weeks leading up to Pentecost Sunday—that's the 5th of June—we are looking to the book of Acts and doing some thinking and listening to what God has to say to us about the place of the church—not just our church here in Largs but also the church in general all around the world, in the 21st century—and we have been asking, among other things, What the church in the so-called Post-Christian age can learn from the church in the pre-Christian age.
- And we started at the beginning of the book of Acts, where we saw that Luke, the author of Acts and of the gospel that bears his name, connects the two books by beginning Acts where he leaves off in the gospel—with Jesus' ascension into heaven—and we said that after that, the disciples choose a replacement for Judas, because he is no longer available since he busted a gut out in a field that he bought with the money he was paid to betray Jesus—that's what Luke tells us—it's there in chapter 1 verse 18—and so that field became known as the Field of Blood.
- After that Luke tells us about what happens at Pentecost, when the disciples gather in Jerusalem as Jesus has told them to do, and the Holy Spirit descends upon them, filling them and enabling them to proclaim the gospel to all the

- Jewish pilgrims who had made the journey to Jerusalem from all over the world, speaking to them in their own native languages—and we saw that most of the people in the crowd find this to be an amazing thing, but some of them make fun of the disciples and accuse them of getting lit before breakfasttime—of course it's not any alcoholic spirit that's responsible for what the crowds witness, it's the work of the Holy Spirit that has lit up the disciples, descending like tongues of fire and alighting on each one of them
- And then of course, Peter steps up and raises his voice in response to those folks, giving a convincing and convicting speech about the place of Jesus as Messiah and Lord within the history of Judaism—referring back to the prophet Joel and to King David—and we said that Peter's actions there at Pentecost were a mighty testimony to the way that Peter had been transformed by the Holy Spirit—from fear to boldness—we suggested that the Holy Spirit empowers Peter's PEG—his P-E-G—his personality, experience and Gifts—and specifically we saw how the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, changed Peter's ATTITUDE, his APTITUDE, and his ALTITUDE, and that the same Spirit that effected Peter's transformation can empower the church and individuals in it—even today—and so we talked about the power of the Holy Spirit to use our PEGs—our personalities, experience and gifts—to change the world.
 - Now last week we looked again at Peter's response to those crowds at Pentecost, and we saw how it paralleled the sermon that John the Baptist gives in the gospel of Luke just before Jesus is baptized and the Holy Spirit

descends like a dove and lands on his body—of course what happens in Jerusalem is that the body of Christ—that is, the early church, is baptized with the Holy Spirit and fire, just like John the Baptist predicted—and there again we're told that the Holy Spirit descends upon that body, just as it has in Luke's gospel.

- But we saw last week that Peter basically tells this crowd of pilgrims that Jesus was the Messiah, and that they, with the help of the Roman Empire crucified him, but he also tells them that even though the Son of God, God incarnate **who humbled himself, and made himself nothing, even to death on a cross**, even though he was dead and buried, the hand of God through the power of the Holy Spirit reached down and raised him up—and the crowd, we're told, thousands of them are baptized and filled with the same Spirit that raised Jesus from the dead, and they become the Christian church, the body of Christ--living out the Kingdom of God through the power of the Spirit there in Jerusalem, and they pray and eat and worship together and use their resources to meet each other's needs—and we suggested that the example of the early church might well be a good one for the church in 2022
- So that's the background, and today, as we heard Pastor Tasha share with us, we see Peter and John going to pray at the temple—and so Luke is telling us that they have not given up their connections to the Temple, their dedication to their traditions-- but we also see that this is a tradition that is seeing something new happen, as Peter has told the crowd at Pentecost, as Jesus

proclaimed in Luke's gospel, the Day of the Lord has come, and as the prophets foretold, God is pouring out his Spirit upon all flesh, releasing the captives, letting the oppressed go free, restoring the broken and bringing healing to the unclean.

- And in the Scripture, from the third chapter of Acts, beginning with the first verse and continuing through verse 10, Luke tells us that one day—he doesn't tell us what day it was, just one day, which is a little unusual for Luke, who as you'll recall from our Meet the Gospels series, loves his details—but Luke doesn't give us that detail, but Luke does tell us the time—it's 3:00 in the afternoon—1500 hours, and Peter and John are going UP to the temple because that is the hour of prayer. If you've ever heard that old hymn "Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer that calls me from a world of care"—now you know what time it's talking about. 3:00, and as they're going in to the temple a man who has been lame since birth is being carried to the gate called Beautiful as he is every day so he can beg for money from the folks who are going on in—and then Luke tells us about a lot of looking and seeing that's going on—this lame beggar SEES Peter and John and asks them for a donation, and then Luke tells us that both Peter and John LOOK at this man—and they look intently—and they tell him "LOOK at us"—and Luke tells us that he does, because he's expecting to get a little something—a little handout—and that is what he gets because Luke tells us that Peter reaches out his hand and takes the man by his right hand (there's Luke's detail again) and raises him up and his feet and ankles are as good as new—better than

new in fact because this man has been lame his entire life. This miracle happens after Peter tells the man that he doesn't have any silver or gold, but what he does have he's gonna give him—and he says “in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.” and Luke tells us that he didn't just sort of feebly try to stand—Luke tells us that he jumps up, he stands and begin to walk, and—then what does he do? He enters the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. and Luke tells us that All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him—they knew who he was—unlike me and Bryce at the top of the hill last week, these folks know who they are looking at—there is no question about his identity—these folks know that this man is the very one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and all these temple-goers are filled with wonder and amazement at what happened to him.

- Now, our sermon this morning is called “From Down and Out to Up and In” and I want to consider this passage of Scripture this morning by looking at 2 very important aspects of the story that Luke tells us, and the way in which he tells it, and for your convenience, and so they're easier to remember-- each of these 2 aspects begins with the letter S.
- And so first I want to talk about the SYSTEM that we find at work in the background to this story, and I'm going to suggest that to really understand the POWER of what happens in these 10 verses, it is a great help to understand the power of the SYSTEM in which they happen—a SYSTEM of political, social, cultural and religious power:

- We read in verse 1 that Peter and John are Going UP to the Temple—directions are important and symbolic for Luke—up is toward the presence of God and heaven and down is toward humanity and death and brokenness—you may remember that before the sermon on the Plain in Luke’s gospel, Jesus takes his disciples up a mountain and then down to the broken places with broken people
- And so we find the disciples going UP to the Temple
- Now understand that this temple is no ordinary church—it is the temple in Jerusalem—the place to which those pilgrims described in the previous chapter have come to worship, to atone for their sins, to come into the presence of God, to offer sacrifices and offerings (after they got their money changed so they could donate currency that wasn’t an abomination—money changers were inside the temple courts and they’d exchange your dirty Greek and Roman money for shekels that you could put in the offering INSIDE the temple),
- This is a temple called The Second Temple, because it replaced the one built by Solomon—this one was rebuilt by Herod—the Roman leader—and it is often referred to as “Herod’s Temple”—and it was opulent—it was extravagant. It took forty-six years to build—rebuild actually-- and it was adorned lavishly with gold-decorated roofs and marble columns.
- According to the Jewish historian, Josephus, the stones used in the construction of Herod’s Temple were so exceedingly white that, from a distance, it resembled a mountain of snow. The sun's reflection from the

extensive gilding made it painful for onlookers to see. And the temple contained not only the voluntary offerings of faithful believers, but also the Roma spoils of war (that was a pagan practice)—**and so the temple represented in a very real way both the Roman political Empire and the Hebrew religious tradition joined together.**

- And so the temple was an expression of the power of wealth and military might and authority.
- And one of the ways that the power of that authority was expressed was through a system of exclusion—a system that designates who are the insiders and who are the outsiders—who are the clean and who are the unclean. And if you were an outsider, if you were unclean, you couldn't enter the Temple's courts, or you could enter only so far, depending on how much of an insider you were. Gentiles were obviously excluded, Jewish women could only enter so far, and those with certain diseases and infirmities that made them unclean, like lepers, eunuchs, and the blind, for instance, were also not permitted to enter
- And according to this system, the lame man that Peter and John meet as they are going UP to the Temple, is an outsider—he is unclean. And therefore he is not permitted to go beyond the gate that he has been brought to, and to which he is brought every single day. And so the lame beggar is not just **physically** impaired, not only is he unable to participate **socially** by earning a living, he is **spiritually** excluded--an "outsider" to the temple community.

He was excluded from the temple and all it symbolized for Israel: **Divine presence, sacrifice, atonement for sin -- to name just a few.**

- And the system here offers no hope to this lame beggar—we are told that he was lame from his mother's womb, and that every day he is brought by others and placed here—his whole life is about what he cannot do—his identity as an outsider, as unclean is insurmountable—he is down and out without hope. He doesn't even have a name. He is **forsaken. My God, my God, he is forsaken.**
- And so what does he do? He lives as the system allows him to—
- In biblical times, the beggar represented one of the lowest, have-nots in society. A man unable to work, reduced to begging as his only hope for sustenance, he is pitiable. And so the lame man begged from religious folk entering the temple. Why did he do this?
- Because they are expected as good religious folk to occasionally give alms—to give charity—this is the Hebrew concept of *zedakah*-- charity in the spirit of uprightness or justice. Wealth was considered a loan from God, as of course it should be-- and the poor had a certain claim on the possessions of the rich. The rich were instructed to share God's bounty with the poor. And so the lame man begged with this expectation in mind. Every single day—the system allows him to survive—but allows him only enough to survive in his place.
- And there was a difference between the Greek and Roman money you would use outside the gate and the shekels that are used inside the temple—that's

why there were money changers—like those currency exchange places you see at the airport because you’ve got to have legal tender to render unto Caesar or to render unto God

- And so when Peter and John pass by, the beggar asks for alms—he knows how this works—these are good people who will do good works—as is expected of them—and so when Peter says **“look at me”** the beggar looks with expectation— **and you know, disciples must be seen, must draw attention to themselves—not pridefully, not with hubris, but as witnesses, proclaimers of the GOOD NEWS—if people don’t look, how will they see? If they don’t hear, how will they listen?—disciples are called to say “Look at me” and “listen up” as Peter told the crowd at Pentecost—and other folks are looking—they’re watching too—and we’ll see next week that the system responds to what it sees—the system exercises its power and Peter and John get taken into custody at the hands of the political and religious leaders**
- But for now this beggar LOOKS at Peter and John with expectation---will he get a small gift or a large one? How generous will the disciples be, he probably wonders—maybe he’s sizing them up, like a used car dealer-- How nice are their shoes? Is Peter wearing a Rolex or a Timex? Are their robes bespoke or off the rack—pret a porter?—do these guys have money? But that question is quickly answered by Peter in the negative—I have no silver or gold

- **But things are about to change by this gate that demonstrates the power of the system---this gate that is called Beautiful but performs the ugly task of preventing those with the greatest needs from accessing the place that "houses God." This beautiful gate that is the grand entrance for some but an impenetrable barrier for others**
- But why THIS gate—why the Gate called Beautiful?
- Let's look at that name for this gate—it is translated as “Beautiful,” but the Greek word is (ho-rah'-yos)—it has the same root as the Greek hora—from which we get the word “hour”—and the word, the name of this gate, has more to do with time than with beauty—it mean seasonable, timely, happening at the right time--ripe, fully developed--ready for harvest
- Remember that Luke has also told us exactly what hour it is—3:00 and that it is the hour of prayer—the hóra of prayer—and now we hear that word again
- And so the very name of the gate reminds us that something new is happening here; the hour has come—the time has been fulfilled—
- The “way things are” is being challenged by the arrival of the Kingdom, by the Power of the Spirit
- And so we see here the beginning of the Post-Pentecost MINISTRY of the Christian church—where **true alms-giving** is demonstrated by giving to any as they had need, an alms-giving that MEETS the NEEDS of the BROKEN, as opposed to the alms-giving of the SYSTEM that keeps this lame beggar in a place of need

- And so Peter gives what he has received, “**what I have, I give you**” he says— and what is that? What does Peter HAVE? Peter has the Power of the Spirit, the power that transforms, the power to rise up as we saw Peter do at Pentecost—and so the Apostles give the lame beggar more than he can ask or even imagine
- Now, understand, saying “Silver and gold have I none” is not just a way to say “I’m broke”—**it’s a refusal to participate in the powerful mechanisms of this system**—a system of haves and have-nots, insiders and outsiders—**the system that gives the beggar just enough to survive—to stay in his place—The system doesn’t really meet his NEED**--but the power of the Kingdom of God gives abundantly, and allows him to rise and enter into worship with the Apostles, walking and jumping and praising God in the courts of his temple---restored physically, spiritually and socially.
- **The good news of the kingdom of God is the distribution of God's healing and salvation to all. Peter speaks not under the authority of the political and religious system, but under the powerful authority of Jesus Christ, saying "Rise up!" and become clean. You are welcome in the house of God.**
- From DOWN AND OUT to UP AND IN--This is a glimpse into the new reality of the new kingdom of God ushered in by the Resurrected Jesus.
- This is what happens when the power of the system meets the power of the Saviour.

- And the **Saviour** is the second aspect of these verses that I want to take a look at.
- We know that Peter says “what I have I give you; in the name of **Jesus Christ of Nazareth**, stand up and walk”
- But that is not the only mention of the redemptive work of Jesus through the cross and resurrection you’ll find here in these verses—
- Let’s look at verse 1: One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o’clock in the afternoon.
- Three o’clock—the Greek says “the ninth hour—but why so specific? What difference does it make what time it was?—why this extra detail?—
- The time though, may sound familiar—and if you’re looking at the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts as two connected texts, you may recall that Luke has specified the hour of 3 o’clock elsewhere—in Chapter 22 of his Gospel—indeed, Mark and Matthew as well refer **specifically to 3 o’clock in their gospels, too**—in the same situation—and that situation is the death of Jesus—here it is from Mark
- At three o’clock Jesus cried out with a loud voice . . . “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?”
- We are reminded that Jesus himself identifies with the broken, the unclean, the down and out—My God, My God why have you forsaken me?” This descent into nothingness—that’s where this man lives—he is forsaken—but that is also where the Spirit of God reaches down and gives life, raises up from death/exclusion to resurrection—from down and out to up and in—the

cross and resurrection and the Power of the Spirit can make the unclean clean—can sanctify, make holy, the outsider—the blood of Jesus offers hope and restoration--as we're reminded in Hebrews 13

- Therefore also Jesus, so that he might sanctify the people by his own blood, suffered outside the gate. **Suffered outside the gate**—not just the gate of the Temple, but the gate of the entire city
- In Jesus' suffering and death, this lame beggar sees his own situation, his own exclusion, and it is the power of the same Spirit that lifted Jesus up that offers new life to him—
- and the crowd that sees this beggar and recognizes him as the one who has risen up looks at him with Wonder and amazement—like after the resurrection, like at Pentecost
- Last week we read that the early church had All things in common, and gave to each other as any had need, and that is just what we see at work here—But what did Peter and John do—did they take up a collection and make this man the richest lame beggar in Jerusalem, who still isn't allowed into the temple? Did they take him out for a one-off meal at a fancy restaurant? Give him the best day of his miserable unclean life? No—they shattered the power of the very system that held him in his place—this is what the power of the Holy Spirit does, this is the work of the Kingdom of God, in opposition to “this corrupt generation”—the Kingdom of God erases the distinctions between clean and unclean, brings healing and allows those outside the gate to come in to the Temple— the good news of the gospel is that if you're down and out,

you don't have to stay there--no matter what any system says, the Saviour says "get up and come on in."