



Our Eyes Were Opened
Sermon by Pastor Paisley Le Roy
Bethlehem Lutheran Church, St. Charles
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PASTOR LE ROY: Our reading from today is from Acts 3. One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer at 3:00 in the afternoon. And a man, lame from birth, was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple, called the beautiful gate, so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said look at us. And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver or gold. But what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And he took him by the right hand and raised him up. And immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk. And he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the beautiful gate of the temple. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. Word of God, Word of life. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Now, as we've been returning back into our building with more and more regularity, I've been getting a lot of comments saying, was that always there. Now, granted, I'm not really the best person to ask because I'm not quite sure what was and was not always here. But many of them have always been, and if they haven't always been, they've been there quite a good chunk of time. There's the cross out front that John illumines with different lights, depending on the season, that I don't think was quite noticeable until all of those lights (inaudible) its place. And then a couple weeks ago I got a question about the carving on this pulpit. Has that always

been there? And the carving up here, has that always been there? And from what I understand, the carvings on the pulpit and the cross have been here, and now they were painted and brought out further a couple years ago, but they've been here. That's just when we aren't familiar to a space and we enter it again, new things catch our eye. We find connections that may not have previously been there because of our context. And I think that's what happens with Peter and John today as they go to the temple to pray. Now, it's the hour of prayer. It's 3:00 in the afternoon, and all good and righteous Jews are making their way into the temple. Now, of course, if we know much of the context of the time, we know that the space in the temple was reserved for males. It was reserved for Jewish folks, those who were declared ritually clean. And so this man, this lame man who has been that way since birth, sits outside. He is unable to enter those doors. And yet daily, daily he gets taken to that gate to ask for alms from those who are entering. Now, it says that every day he was brought there. And that got me wondering. How old is this man? Now, a lot of commentators suggest that he's about 40 years old. So if you do the math, he's younger than Jesus was when Jesus died. And so probably for 40 years, every single day, he's been sitting outside of that temple. Now, maybe you're making the connection that I made, that Jesus had passed by this man multiple times. Jesus daily, whenever he was in Jerusalem and visited the temple, passed by this man who was asking for alms, and we don't see him anywhere in scripture, this man in desperate need of healing. And so Peter and John also would have been visiting the temple, would have passed by him each and every day. But this day, this day something was different. Now, the verb here in Greek, when it translates into "they looked intently at him," is *atenizó*, which is, again, look intently. But it's a word that's used as if your eyes were open to someone, perhaps, for the first time. So it's saying in this passage that this man who had been there for 40 years every single day is noticed by him for the very first time. And so I can't help but wonder what's different from the times before. He probably called out to them each time, and they probably

didn't hear him or decided to ignore him. But what was different this time? Well, it's the story that we heard just the chapter before. The Spirit of God has descended upon them and has made them speak different languages and has sent them out into the world. They are now noticing things that they had never noticed before. The Spirit of God had opened their eyes to something new. And so this man, this beloved child of God, was truly seen for the first time. I think in and of itself, that is enough of a miracle. But then he opens his mouth and he says, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I can give." So what is it that Peter and John have that this man does not have? The ability to enter into the temple. The fact that they are able-bodied, and they have had a relationship with Christ. They journeyed with Jesus during His ministry on Earth and had walked with the risen Christ afterwards as well. So he has faith in Jesus Christ. But if you see, there's no requirement for this guy to say, do you also have this faith in Jesus Christ. No. Peter's faith is enough. Peter's faith is what he gives that guy and says, in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and be healed. Well, what's even more important is that we look at the order of this healing. So healing narratives throughout the Gospel and, of course, continuing into Acts have the same kind of rhythm. You see the beginning encounter, the person in need of healing, and the person who would do the healing. You see an ask, a response, and then you see an act of gratitude. So Peter looks intently and invites the man to gaze at him, too. Even that annotation, that says look up and look at me in the eyes, that is something new. Because his exchange with people beforehand was one of just expectation. One of, his entire needs were all expected to be provided. All that he has to survive on, his entire existence was only at the hands of others. And that left him humble. He had his gaze down. Peter says, no, look up. Look at me. He speaks those words and then invokes the name of Jesus Christ to heal him. He speaks those words of healing. And 2000 years later, they ring a little differently than before. But this would have been only months after Jesus had died and was risen. So people would be very familiar

when they hear, "in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." He would say, well, didn't we get rid of that guy already? What do you mean, this name is still doing these works? So he says that, and he reaches out and takes him by the right hand. Now, this isn't Luke giving a lot of extra details, which he is known for. But there's something very special about that right hand. Of course, we say that Jesus is seated at the right hand of the Father. But this right hand is a symbol of fellowship. It is what you reach out to greet those who were of equal status with you. There was no way that you would reach out that right hand of fellowship to someone who was not of the same status as you. So in this simple moment, in this one or one words, he is bringing down all of the barriers between able-bodied and disabled, between ritually clean and ritually unclean, between Jew and perhaps gentile -- we don't know where that man is from. He's bringing down all of these barriers. So he reaches out with that right hand of fellowship, he takes him by the hand, and he raises him up. So he speaks the word of healing, he reaches down, and he takes him up. And that word translates as "raised him up" is egeiro, which is the Greek word that's commonly used in the context of resurrection. So it's the word that we find when we hear the story of Jesus encountering Lazarus and raising him from the dead. It's the word that is used when Jesus meets the little girl who has fallen asleep but who had really died. It is that word that is used. Egeiro is not simply raised him up, it's not a simple, okay, I lifted this person up. It is a resurrection word. So in this encounter the power of the resurrection, the healing power of the resurrection is at work in the world. And what happens next? This lame man, 40 years old, who has never once walked in his entire life, jumps up. I mean, he doesn't even do a careful little step to test things out. He jumps right up and walks into the temple with them. He was frolicking and praising God because for the first time, he was walking. But also, friends, for the first time, perhaps ever, he was going into the temple. And as a people who have been sort of exiled from their own sanctuary, you know the power of walking into that temple, this place, for the first time in a long time. Now imagine if you had never

even been. And so he gets up, he walks, he's frolicking, he's skipping around like crazy and going into the temple to pray for the first time in his life. And the people who witness it are in wonder and amazement. And soon after, Peter and John -- you'll see this next week -- he'll get arrested for this act because he evoked the name of Jesus. He used resurrection power, and that's some scary stuff to the people who are in charge. And then this act, this first act of the apostles, which is an act of healing, Peter is continuing the faithful work of Jesus Christ. And like I said, it would have just been a couple months after Jesus was handed over. And so that power would ring even more and even truer. It would make the jaws drop of those who were there because it would show that even the (inaudible) does not and cannot ever have the power to stomp out resurrection active in this world, active in the lives of the apostles and those they come in contact with. And so this is the first story, the first story of the Holy Spirit working radically in and through the apostles. Now, we have to hang on and see what else that Spirit calls them to do. But in this moment, that man is as good as resurrected from the dead. His life is before him for the first time. He not only is made whole individually, but he's able to be in community again. That is a miracle, a miracle that probably rings truer to our ears today as it would have two years ago. Because the resurrection power continues not only to impact us personally in our lives, but impacts our community with every step we make towards being together as church community again. So, friends, I invite you this week to think of where you see that resurrection healing taking place in your midst. It's hard because we have this idea that healing is healing. But resurrection power shows up in unexpected ways. And it's not often until we step back and we really look that we can see it popping up place after place after place. Because where relationships and mutuality can happen, where people can frolic and praise God once more, that is the power of the resurrection at work. That is the healing we should strive for in this world. And it is that that gives us the glimpse of the Kingdom of God that is real in this world and that is breaking into this

world every single day. And for the gift of being able to experience that power, to claim it as our own, we say thanks be to God. Amen.