

Evensong readings:-

Deut ch.7, vv7-13

Rev ch.2, vv1-11

Gospel: Luke ch.16, vv19-end

by
Didymus

As there will be an Evensong at Rock, I will talk instead about the reading for Holy Communion, which is the third chapter of the Book of Acts.

This tells us the story of the healing at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple. It is a wonderful story, especially as told in William Tyndale's translation, attached.

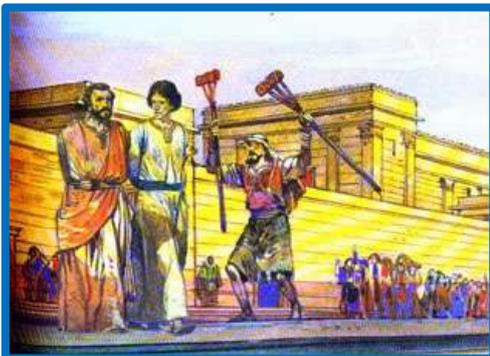
It is an amazing story, the more beautiful for the language of

Shakespeare's day, and it should not be too difficult to understand in today's language. It is one of my favourite passages, partly because it entices us to face the problem with the Bible. It is that we have to remember that the stories are about real people. They really happened.

The Great Commission of Jesus Christ at Ascension had been declared to the Disciples, to go out, baptise and preach the eternal Gospel, and he, Jesus would always be with them. Shortly after, the day of Pentecost had occurred, and Peter and John were walking into the Temple to pray. What, I wonder, went through Peter's mind as they walked to the Temple? He and John must have known the lame man sitting outside the Temple, as he was always there, and they must have felt sorry for him, of course. But did he know that the man would be healed, I wonder? What made him stop and speak to the man? What – or who – made him tell the man to stand up? Both Disciples had been empowered by the Risen Jesus, but the sight of the man, at his words, being lifted up from where he was laying, walking and leaping about in joy, must have been beyond description.

The crowd of worshippers knew who the man was, and were astonished, as is written in Acts. Before very long the news of the miracle had reached the Temple authorities, which we can look at later. More important was the speech when Peter spoke to the Jews at the Temple, telling them what they had done. He had no doubts. The miracle came not from either John or himself, but from the one who had been killed, and he denounced those who had allowed Barabbas, a murderer to live in his stead. Peter had changed very much from the enthusiastic but blundering fisherman to fulfil Jesus' faith in him.

The Beautiful Gate was one of a number of gates to the Temple, so called because it was decorated with copper ornamentations. It was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD as a result of the Jewish uprising.



I am sorry that the only illustration that I could find portraying the Lame Man healed, waving a pair of 1960s vintage NHS crutches is rather far from the classical paintings.



One of my favourite features in The Times is the work of their senior cartoonist, Peter Brookes, who is a pungent observer of life, but also an exceedingly fine portrait artist. On the death of Philip, Duke of Edinburgh, he produced a stunning portrait of our Queen, based on a superb photograph taken by the late Patrick Lichfield. It is copyright, but I include it below, partly because it sums up the great void he left in our Queen's life, her family and in ours. We shall no doubt be thinking of this truth with his funeral tomorrow.



AMEN

3 Now Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple;

Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, *Look on us*. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

Then Peter said, *Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk*. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up: and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

And all the people saw him walking and praising God: And they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple: and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him. And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.

And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, *Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.*

But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you; And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses. And his name

through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled. Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord.