

APRIL 9/10, 2016

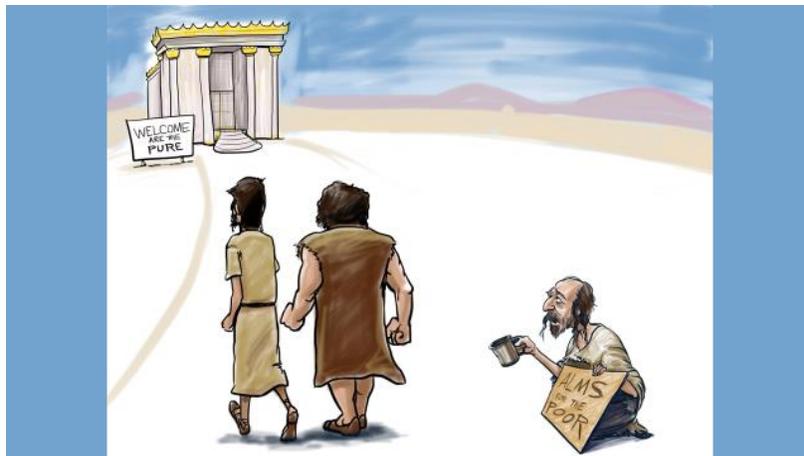
PASTOR SCOTT FULLER

ACTS 3:1-10; MARK 6:53-56

*Dear friends in Christ: Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.*

*Prepare our hearts, Lord, to receive your Word. Silence in us any voice but your own that in hearing we may believe and in believing we may obey your will revealed to us in Jesus Christ. Amen.*

We have a beautiful story of healing to look at today. We hear about a man who can't walk, in fact, who's **never** been able to walk – and has **always** had to rely on people to carry him everywhere he needed to go. He ekes out an existence by being carried from wherever he lives to a spot on the ground near a gate into the temple, all so that he can beg from folks who are going to and from worship...



Day after day, month after month, season after season, year after year, decade after decade... this man has been carried to the Temple gate in the morning, and back to his shelter at night.

He's never known a time when he could get from one place to another by himself. His whole life has been defined by being **dependent** – on good church-goin' folk for their **generosity**, and on family members, neighbors and friends to get him from point A to point B and back again.

Let's take a moment to imagine what life was like for this man... just thinking about his situation stirs up some questions:

- How did he care for himself?
- How did he carry his groceries?
- How did he prepare his meals?
- Where did he find a place to live?
- How did it feel to be so utterly dependent on others???
- How did it feel to be barred from the Temple because he was crippled?

That's true – as if life weren't hard enough already. In addition to his physical and emotional challenges, we have to remember what folks in those days thought about people who suffered: the assumption was that they'd done something to deserve it!

In the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter of John's Gospel (9:1-2), we're told that the disciples, walking with Jesus one day, come upon a man who had been blind since birth. The disciples say to the Lord, *Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?*

People believed that bad things would not happen to good people. And they believed the opposite to be true – bad things only happened to people who'd done something to deserve it. So both of these men – the one who was blind and the other who was lame – were being punished, people believed, either because of some sin they had committed, or some sin of their parents.

I want to know what you think about that:

- Is it true that good people never suffer?** And is it also true that
- People who suffer have done something bad to deserve it?**

Nope, you're right – **we** don't believe that **either** of those statements are true...**especially** because **Jesus** didn't believe that either statement was true. Instead, **Jesus** believed that every

suffering person we meet is an opportunity to display God's mercy and love.

Said the Lord to his followers about the blind man, *Neither this man nor his parents sinned; he was born blind so that God's works might be revealed in him.*

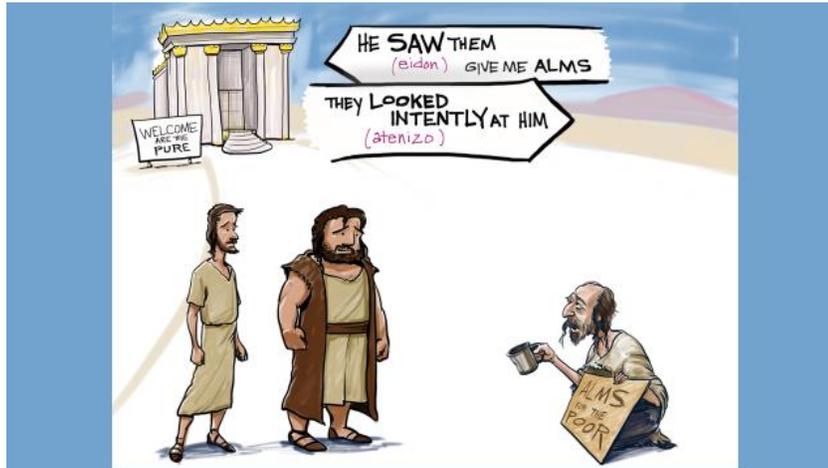
It's a lesson that the disciples appear to have learned very well. As Peter and John are going into the temple to pray, this man who has never walked, *sees* them and asks them for some money. Peter *looked at him intently, as did John*, and said, *Look at us*. Then we're told that the man *fixed his attention on them*, expecting to receive some coins.

5 times in three short verses there's a reference to **looking**, or **seeing**, or making some kind of **visual connection** between the disciples and this man. I invite you to watch the screens for a moment:

-The man *saw* Peter and John

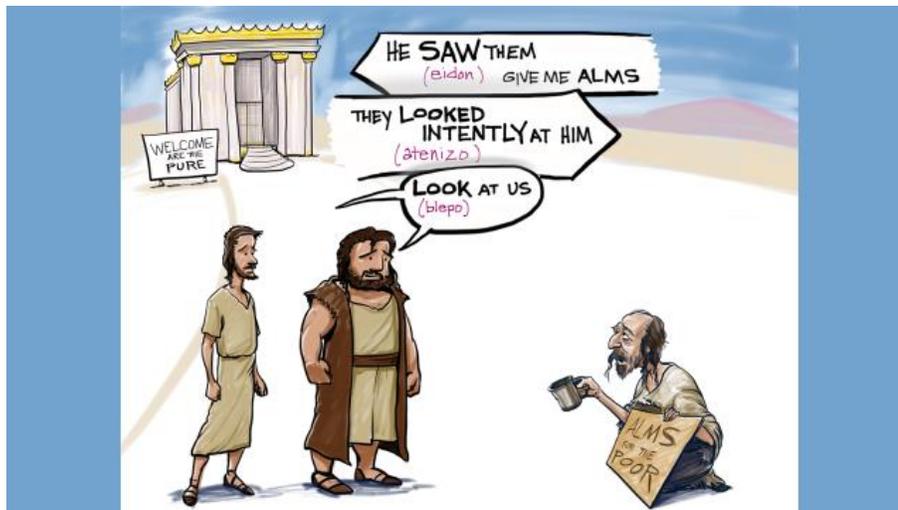


*-Peter looked at him intently*

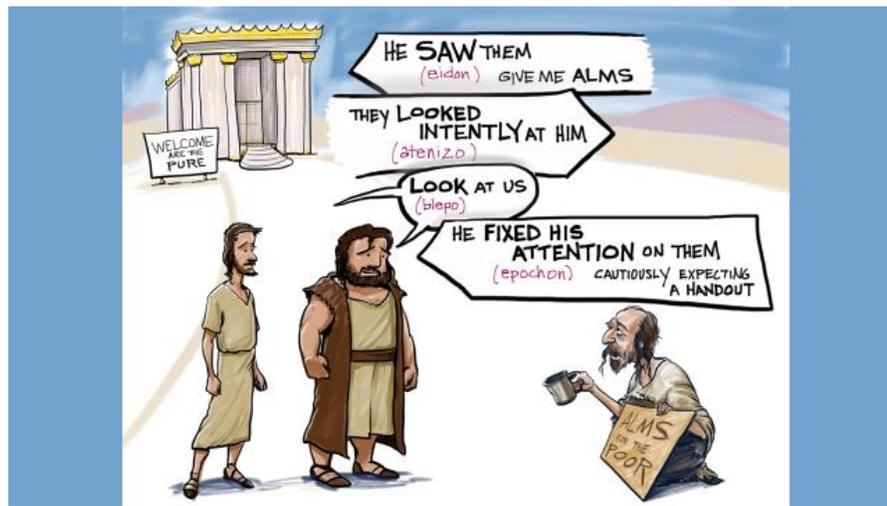


*-as did John*

*-and said, **Look at us***



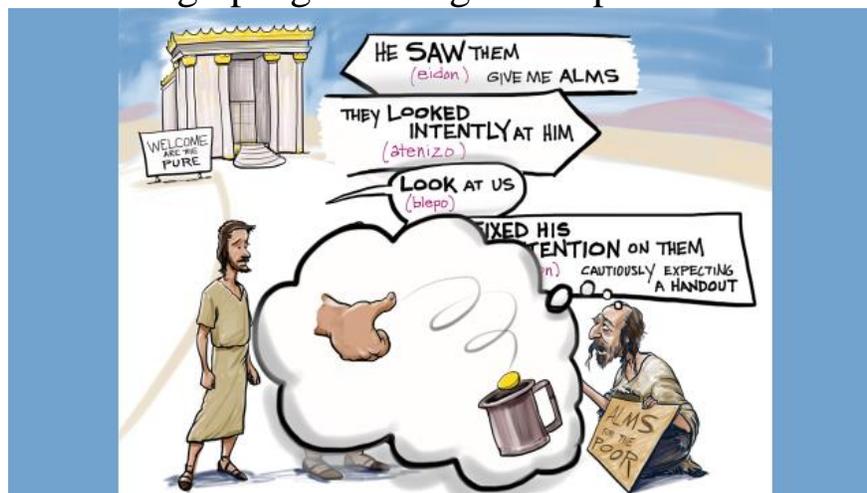
-The man *fixed his attention* on them



### What happens to us when we're close enough to look someone in the eye?

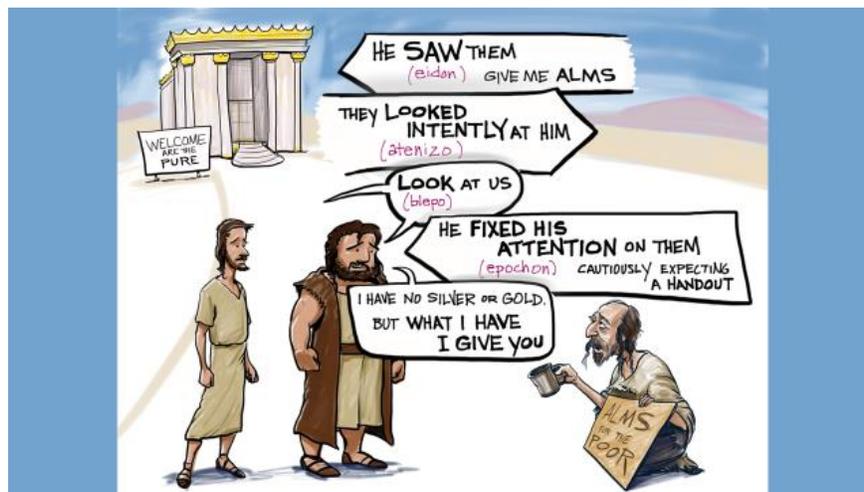
Isn't it true that instead of remaining one of many people, they suddenly become a person...a neighbor...??

In our ministry with some of the homeless people in Anchorage, I learned something about them that made me stop and think. During the winter months, it's very common at the busiest intersections around town to have a number of homeless people on the corners holding up signs asking for help.

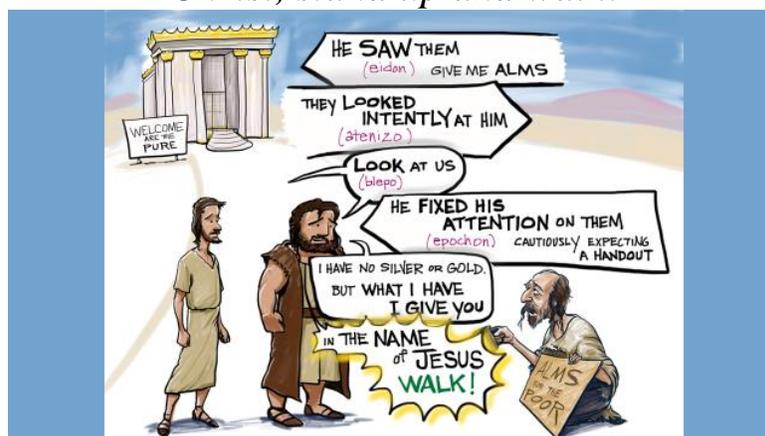


In a conversation with some of those folks, one man said that, even though they're standing out in the open, they feel **invisible** to people like us. And I had to admit that he was right. When I looked at them, I looked through them. I never saw anyone I knew or would recognize again. I never looked at them and saw a neighbor...I saw homeless people that had become invisible...

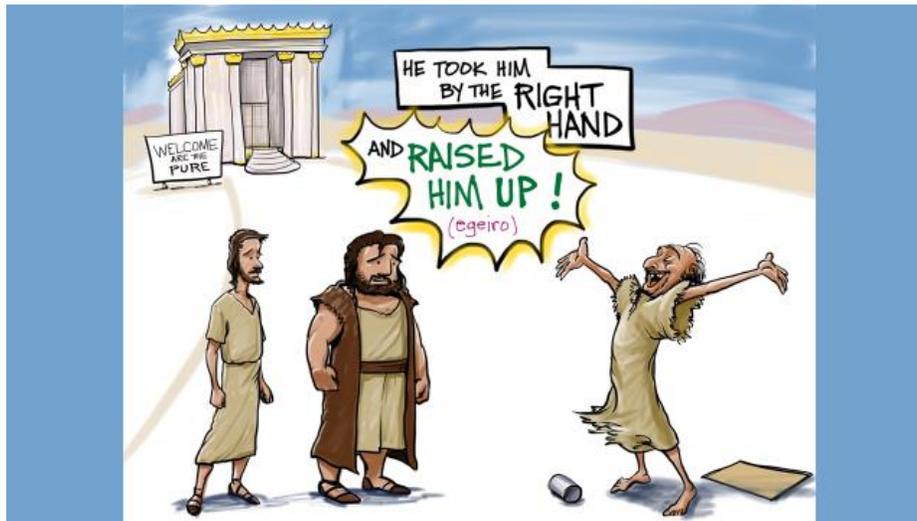
That's why I love this part in the story where we're told that Peter and John looked intently at the man, and that he fixed his attention on them. We can't help or be in a relationship with people we cannot see, right???



So back to the story: with no silver or gold in their pockets, Peter said to the man, *I'll give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ, 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.*



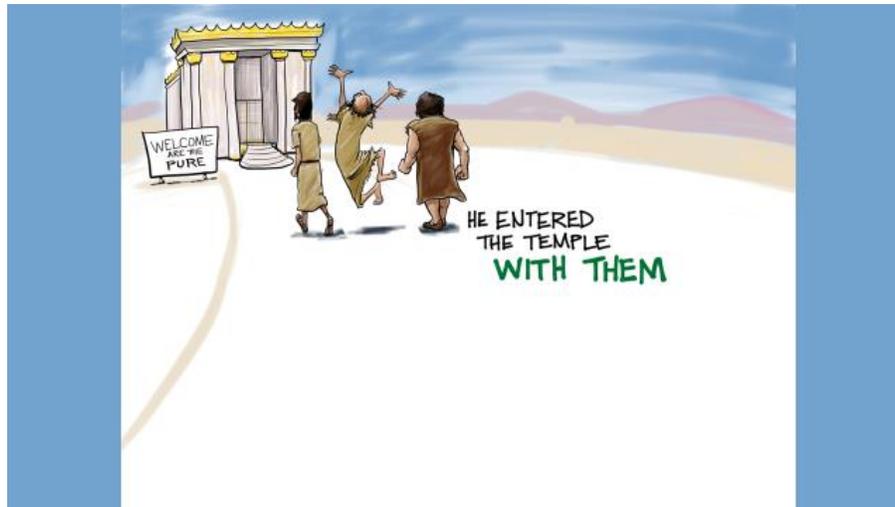
Can you just imagine how everybody felt who witnessed that miracle?? The man, his helpers, his family; the disciples; the crowd?? How would it feel, how would you feel, to suddenly have sturdy feet and strong legs, to walk and leap for the first time in your life?

What would change for him and his helpers?

- Independence
- Employment
- Feeling useful
- Feeling vindicated
- Feeling hopeful

With the disciples' look, their touch and their words, life has suddenly changed. Gone is the feeling of total dependence on relatives, strangers and friends. Gone is the sense of being made to feel guilty for something you didn't do. Gone is the sense of

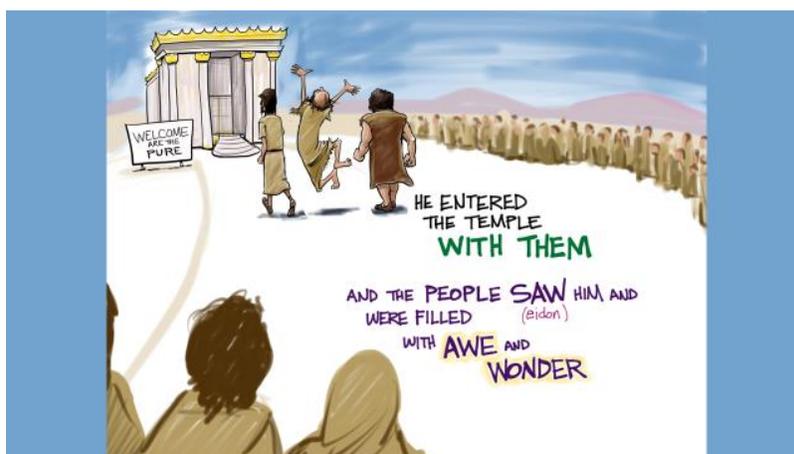
hopelessness that comes from being invisible even as you sit by a busy gate.



What would be the effect of this event on the disciples?

- Assurance that Jesus is with them
- Trust that the Holy Spirit will work through them
- Confidence that Jesus' promises were true
- Excitement to take those promises to the ends of the earth

And finally, what's the effect on the crowd?



They are filled with *wonder and amazement* at what had happened...WONDER and AMAZEMENT = we've heard this combination of words before – and very recently. In fact, these are the same root words that the Gospel writer Mark used to describe the women on that first Easter morning. Do you remember what he said?

*They fled from the tomb, for **terror** and **amazement** had seized them; and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.*  
(Mark 16:8)

If it's a coincidence, that's cool. If it's intentional, that's a dynamic use of language to bring us full-circle from death to life, from terror and amazement to wonder and amazement, from fear to joy, from darkness to light, from emptiness to wholeness, from despair to hope.

*Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.*

You and I will probably never see such a dramatic healing as this, to watch a man lame from birth suddenly jumping and walking and leaping with joy. But the truth is, we will see plenty of other people who will be blessed by us seeing them, by us looking at them, by us helping them feel a little less invisible, by us inviting them to walk with us as friends and neighbors in faith.

Sometimes we'll have silver and gold to share with those in need. Always we will have the name of Jesus Christ and his love to share. Amen.