

What I Have I Give to You
Acts 3:1-10
Mark 6:53-56

Westminster Presbyterian Church
Pastor Doug Browne
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Acts 3:1-10

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock 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.

Mark 6:53-56

When they had crossed over, they came to land at Gennesaret and moored the boat. When they got out of the boat, people at once recognized him, and rushed about that whole region and began to bring the sick on mats to wherever they heard he was. And wherever he went, into villages or cities or farms, they laid the sick in the market-places, and begged him that they might touch even the fringe of his cloak; and all who touched it were healed.

If you watch enough late-night television these days, or spend enough time on the Internet, you will hear somebody explaining in all seriousness that this pandemic is the beginning of Armageddon, the end of the world.

I don't think these people really understand what's happening here.

This is not the end of the world. This virus is not God's plan, or God's judgment on humanity. That is terrible theology, the kind that hurts people. God does not create tragedy in the world. But God can use tragedy for good, like using Joseph's personal tragedies to put him into a position to save people from a famine. Joseph's brothers intended what they did for evil, but God

used it for good. There's a big difference between intending something and using something that someone else has already done.¹

What this pandemic is, is an apocalypse. That may not sound a lot better, but let me explain. The word "apocalypse" gets its association with destruction and the end of the world from the Biblical book of Revelation, and people not understanding what the word means. The book name "Revelation" is a translation of the Greek word "Apocalypse." The word "apocalypse" in Greek literally means an uncovering, or a revealing of something that's been there all along.²

This pandemic has revealed to a lot of parents how difficult their kids' teachers' jobs are, and how their work should be better respected and better compensated.

This pandemic has revealed that we all depend every day on many, many people whom we avoid thinking about and who are often paid as little as the law will allow. Grocery store workers, farm workers, factory workers, retail store employees.

This pandemic has revealed how many people, how many families, are one or two paychecks away from being clients at the food bank, or even homeless. And it has revealed that our social safety nets are inadequate to the task.

The pandemic has revealed how many people are willing and able to stop what they're doing to help others, whether it's making masks or buying groceries.

¹ The Synod of Mid-America has a good video on this at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=m6UwCpCrqaM&feature=youtu.be&fbclid=IwAR0tWMidkpf9lWSpr4eumjVVFmWoHcHODJ_fYtuQ2Di3rvjfVbjXP4GFwIQ.

² Greek *apo-* (un-) and *kaluptein* (to cover).

This pandemic has revealed that attaching health care benefits to jobs means that people, particularly poor people, tend to lose those benefits just when they need them most. And losing health care benefits in the middle of a pandemic is playing the lottery. Not the Powerball, but Shirley Jackson's famous story, "The Lottery," where the so-called "winner" dies.³ And there have been a lot of that kind of winners.

This pandemic has revealed that we as a society value some human beings a lot more than others. Some people can self-isolate: not work, or work from home. Others can't. That privilege of self-isolating tends to go with money. The people who cannot self-isolate, who have to choose between being safe and having food on the table, are the same ones who are least likely to have good health insurance to care for them if they get sick. Those are the people whom we prefer not to see, not to acknowledge.

Jesus loved people who were poor. That's not a political statement. It's simply the Gospel. Jesus told poor people that they were loved by God, not despised. Jesus told poor people that the kingdom of God was for them. Jesus preached and lived a radical departure from the then-accepted idea that God loves and bless wealthy people, but that poor people must be sinners and deserve the terrible situation they are in.⁴ In a world defined by a mentality of scarcity, Jesus preached acceptance and a transformed society where there is enough for everyone. And Jesus' followers have been charged by Jesus to continue his work.

³ Shirley Jackson, "The Lottery," in *The New Yorker*, June 26, 1948.
<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1948/06/26/the-lottery>.

⁴ Anyone still preaching this so-called "Prosperity Gospel" is preaching the opposite of what Jesus preached.

This story is the first thing that happens in Acts after the story of Pentecost, when Jesus' followers receive the Holy Spirit and are sent out to get to work on that. We'll come back to the story of Pentecost next month.⁵

Peter and John look at this beggar. They look at him, and they really see him. The way that Jesus looked at people, and saw them. The way that we should be looking at people.

The beggar asks for money, and they have no money. But Peter gives him what he has. Peter has the power of the Holy Spirit. He heals the man.

You and I generally can't miraculously heal the sick or injured people whom we meet. But that's okay. We shouldn't get hung up on what we don't have. Peter says it right there, "What I have I give to you."

What do we have?

Some of us have money, and we can use it for good. We can use it to help people who do not. We can give to the food bank, to charities that are helping feed people and provide medical care. At the very least, we can ensure that we tip heavily any of those "essential workers" who are delivering stuff to us so that we don't have to go out. We can give them a break if something's not what we expect.

Most of us have the power to vote. If you haven't mailed your Primary mail-in ballot yet, you need to do it today or tomorrow. The General Election is coming this Fall. We can vote prayerfully, thinking about God's priorities.

⁵ Pentecost is celebrated on May 31st this year.

There is one thing that we all have. We have the grace of Jesus Christ, and God's love. We can show graciousness and love to everyone. Not just the people whom we see as being like us. But all our neighbors. We can be patient, and kind with everyone.

“If you cannot preach like Peter, if you cannot pray like Paul, you can tell the love of Jesus and say, ‘He died for all.’” Our actions speak louder than any words.

We can give to others what we have been given.

We can treat everyone with grace and love.

Even the people whom others ignore until they're needed, like part of the furniture.

No, especially those people.

And, when the apocalypse of this pandemic is done, we can choose not to let everything go back to just the way that it was. We can learn from this apocalypse. We can learn to do better.

I pray with all my heart that we do.

Amen.