

“Seeing Christ”  
a sermon by Kyndall Rae Rothaus  
concerning Acts 3:1-19  
for Lake Shore Baptist Church, Waco  
on April 15, 2018

The text says he was a man lame from birth, which means he had never walked before. Never toddled around on wobbly little baby legs, never ran in a footrace with his childhood friends, never up and went somewhere on his own accord. In our story today he had to be carried to the gate where he could beg for money. A gate ironically called “Beautiful.” In front of Beautiful, the beggar lay, his poverty no doubt overshadowed by the magnificence of the temple. And when he saw Peter and John entering through the gate, naturally he asked them for money, but I don’t think he expected an answer because the text says Peter and John looked at him and Peter had to plead, “Look at us,” to get the beggar’s attention. He had seen them, but he not seen that they were seeing him. You get the impression he was not too used to being seen.

Peter clarifies immediately that he doesn’t actually have any money to give him, but he does have something to give, and he will give it freely. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!” he says, holding out his hand and helping the beggar up. I love the detail the text provides here saying, “The man’s feet and ankles became strong.” Imagine how that would feel—bones and joints and muscles that have never been properly used suddenly strengthening beneath your unsteady knees and holding you upright for the very first time. Imagine how tall he must have felt! What a new perspective to be eye-level with the people and not beneath them—to see out and not just up, to see from new heights. Is this what it feels like to be liberated by Jesus? Instead of needing some outside force to move him this way or that, suddenly he could take his own steps, make his own choices, move his own body, live his own life, see the world in a whole new light.

The text says the man didn’t just start walking. He jumps! And who can blame him? I don’t if was bunny hops or hopscotch steps or open-armed leaps and bounds—probably he tried it all. Toe wiggles, leg squats, dance jigs, and karate kicks. “Anybody got a jump rope? I’ve always wanted to try.” This wild movement was worship. He was praising God with every squirm of a limb, and it was infectious. All around him, the people were smiling.

It’s pretty cool because the text says they recognized him as the beggar who sat at the Gate called Beautiful, which means some people were, in fact, seeing him. Imagine if everyone had ignored him all the time—they would have missed the miracle!! They would have just thought him a strange man hopping over sidewalk cracks like a child and not understood at all that God had just showed up.

It reminds of when I was driving down Valley Mills a couple months ago, and somewhere near the Whataburger, a grown man was doing a cartwheel on the sidewalk. I don’t why. I was so distracted by the day’s problems, though. Like, I almost missed it. This unreserved expression of joy, this outburst of vibrancy, and I almost drove by without seeing.

Thank goodness the people outside the temple that day weren't in too big of a hurry. They stopped, they looked, *they recognized*. They marveled. All as it should have been.

Only, one thing was wrong, which Peter, in his Peter-way, made sure to point out. The people are acting all surprised and amazed as if this were something new. But Peter reminds them, you had *Jesus* among you, healing and liberating all over the place, and instead of marveling at that, you hung that miracle-worker on a tree. In other words, you completely failed to see him for what he was when he was here. But glory be! God raised him from the dead. Your chance is not over. It's not too late. If you can see this man whom God has healed before your eyes, you can see Jesus too. Repentance is what we call it when the scales fall from your eyes.

Now, it's not as if Peter himself had 20/20 vision all the time. The reason he could preach repentance was because of all those times Jesus had caught him blind. Like in our Luke passage from today, Jesus appears to the disciples after his resurrection, and the disciples think he is a ghost! Jesus says, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts rise in your minds? Look at my hands and my feet. It is I myself! Touch me and see; a ghost does not have flesh and bones, as you see I have."

But still, they do not believe him. He eats some broiled fish, and they finally start to figure it out. Everyone knows ghosts can't eat food . . . so he must be the real deal. There's another story, Matthew 14. The disciples are on the boat and they see this figure walking on the lake. Do they recognize Jesus? No. Surprise, surprise. They think he is a ghost.

In Mark 8 Jesus asks the disciples, "Who do you say I am?" and Peter correctly answers, "You are the Messiah." But then Jesus begins to explain that the Messiah must suffer and die, and Peter tries to rebuke him. Peter does not fully see. This is a common discipleship problem.

Right after the resurrection, Mary Magdalene mistakes Jesus for the gardener. The two companions on the road to Emmaus do not recognize him either. Both pre and post resurrection, Jesus is difficult to recognize. Peter pleads with the people in Acts to give up their blindness and see.

On Easter morning this year I rose early from my bed at the Lebh Shomea House of Prayer where I had gone for retreat. In the early dawn, before Easter Mass, I walked down the nature path towards the wildflower patch, and in the early morning light, the words kept repeating themselves in my mind, "Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, they went to the tomb . . ." As I walked, I thought of the women walking to the tomb, not knowing they would find it empty.

I sat down among the tombstones that occupy one corner of the wildflower field. They call it a cemetery, but I call it the wildflower field because it's mostly flowers with a small smattering of gravestones. Usually I sit on the far side on a bench under a shade tree. But today I chose the other end, where the graves were, because I was identifying with the women and their trek to the tomb. I sat there looking out past the stones at the blankets of pink and blue and red and white and purple flowers, their shimmering beauty, and I wondered where my Easter was. The agony of Good Friday, the emptiness of Holy Saturday had made sense to me. I missed my baby, my

foster baby who had been moved just days before. Easter made less sense; didn't fit my own narrative quite as well. No one came running up with my baby in their arms to give her back to me, and I didn't expect them too. I sighed and prepared myself for a Sunday equally empty to Saturday.

Something happened next that I didn't quite expect. It was slow, and I didn't notice at first. But as I sat there staring at the wildflowers, this warmth of gratitude slowly began to overtake me. I thought of Leila's beautiful little face and smooth baby skin, and I smiled and smiled and smiled. God, how lucky I am to know her, to have held her, to love her. What a gift.

I really didn't expect to feel anything but sadness that Easter morning, but surprisingly I was given this joy, this consuming sense of gratitude for getting to be in on the miracle of Leila's life, a little girl who fought so many odds against her just to be alive, and I knew in that moment that she was a gift—my miracle—regardless of the fact that I didn't get to keep her.

That moment didn't erase my sadness. I haven't stopped missing her. But for those Easter morning moments in the cemetery flowers I saw this other reality that was happening side-by-side with my sad reality. It was like I walked through a Gate into another realm and all I could see for minute after minute was Beauty. Wave after wave of beauty—couldn't even see my own poverty and loss, so much did the beauty overshadow it.

The point is, sometimes we're begging for help and don't even know the Gate to a new way of seeing is right beside us. But by the Grace of God, sometimes we are brought to our feet and given the sight to see.

I saw something else on Easter. I was still on my early morning walk. I hadn't yet made it to the cemetery/wildflowers when off in the distance I saw this . . . creature. It was a ways off, but I had startled it and it bolted, but not before I got a good look. It was like no animal I had ever seen before, and after it was out of my sight, I kept wondering if I had imagined it. At lunch I timidly asked the locals, afraid they would laugh at me, "Is there . . . some kind of wild animal that lives out here that is bigger than a deer and a sort of blue-gray color?"

"Oh yes," they replied immediately, as if this were the most natural question in the world. "It's an exotic animal from India brought to South Texas for wild-game hunting. Some type of antelope—they think a crossbreed between an antelope and a giraffe. They are very shy creatures, so you rarely ever see them, except perhaps right at dawn."

Maybe seeing that antelope seems totally unrelated to you, but not to me. It was just one more example that every once in a while, we are given the grace to see something that was there all along, but we didn't know to see it.

This, I think, is part of what it means to be Christian. We keep asking for the grace to see Christ, and Christ often appears where we weren't expecting—in the face of a neighbor, a beggar, a child, a flower. To be Christian is to continually ask for new sight, new perspective, to get a little peek at things through God's glasses instead of your own.

It reminds me of one of my favorite Naomi Shihab Nye poems, "Valentine for Ernest Mann," in which she writes,

Once I knew a man who gave his wife  
two skunks for a valentine.  
He couldn't understand why she was crying.  
"I thought they had such beautiful eyes."  
And he was serious. He was a serious man  
who lived in a serious way. Nothing was ugly  
just because the world said so. He really  
liked those skunks. So, he re-invented them  
as valentines and they became beautiful.  
At least, to him. And the poems that had been hiding  
in the eyes of skunks for centuries  
crawled out and curled up at his feet.

Maybe if we re-invent whatever our lives give us  
we find poems. Check your garage, the off sock  
in your drawer, the person you almost like, but not quite.  
And let me know.

Dear Resurrected Christ, make us see. Raise us up to new heights and new perspective. Set free our eyes. Amen.