

Sharing What We Have to Offer

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Acts Sermon Series #2

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Today is the second in our sermon series on the Mighty Acts of God, found in the book of Acts. And like last week, I invite you to open your pew Bibles to Chapter 3 as we will reference particular passages as we go along today.

Last week, we met up with the disciples of Jesus in chapter 1 of Acts. The scene was set as Jesus ascended into heaven and they were given the instruction to wait...wait for the Holy Spirit to give them power to take the next steps of faith, to be Christ's witnesses wherever they were called to go. They could not do it on their own, God would continue to provide for them, but they were no longer following the flesh and bones of Jesus around. Training camp was over. The Spirit came and launched followers of Jesus into new territory. Empowered by the Spirit, it was evident that God was doing a new thing, a powerful thing, and God was using ordinary people to accomplish extraordinary things for the sake of God's kingdom.

(Prayer)

When I was contemplating whether to go to seminary eight or ten years ago, I remember asking Luther Seminary to send me some information. A week or so later, a package arrived in the mail and in it was a DVD that was labeled, "God Could Use Someone Like You". My first thought as a relatively modest, Midwest Lutheran was "Oh, I don't know about that...that's kind of presumptuous to assume, don't you think. God could use someone like me? But why? How?"

What I came to realize is that my questions came from focusing on the "God could use someone **like you**" part of that statement and not enough on "**God could use** someone like you". I mean look at the people that God chooses to use to make God's long term plan of salvation a reality; verse 1 there is Peter and John. They were average Joes, who rented boats to fish for a living and only gained attention after Jesus got a hold of them. Verse 6 suggests that even if they were recognized for following Jesus, they still didn't have any money or material wealth. The beggar was a passive figure

with a vision too small for what God was willing to do with him until John and Peter come along. Yet God uses the beggar to testify to all the people in the temple how big God's vision is for all of humanity. When the people seem dumbstruck at the site of the crippled beggar completely healed and dancing in their presence, Peter is moved by the Spirit to preach a sermon of remembrance.

He reminds the people in verses 12 and 13 who they've come to worship, and whom God used to bring about salvation. God used Jesus, a carpenter's son and the Author of Life to free the whole world from sin and isolation from God, even though the rulers of the temple and the empire had him nailed to a tree to die a criminal's death. God used Abraham, an old, wandering nomad to be the ancestor of a multitude of nations, through whom God would bless the world. God used Isaac; the child whom his parents, Abraham and Sarah, never believed would come, to fulfill the covenant that God had made with Abraham. God used Jacob, a swindler and a cheater, to give rise to the 12 tribes of Israel and to fulfill God's promise to make many nations from the descendants of Abraham. God used Moses, a stuttering, doubting, do-it-all-yourselfer, to rescue God's stubborn and often complaining people from the hand of slavery. If God can use this collection of seemingly ordinary folks, then surely God could not only use someone like me and you; God WILL use people like us because God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things.

Like our faith ancestors before us, we can sometimes forget who has claimed us and who we belong to. Yet regardless of our memory, we belong to the God of power and grace who has washed us clean in the waters of baptism and through those waters has raised us up into a life of joyful relationship with God. In these waters, the Holy Spirit gets a hold of us and we are changed because of it.

Regardless of who we are: what we do for a living, whether we are old, young or somewhere in between, we all have something to offer, something to give to each other and to those outside of this church. We have Jesus to offer. We have the experience of knowing that God has redeemed us, has chosen to love us, and has called us into new life even while we still live in this life. What we have to offer doesn't come from us, but from God living in us and living through us. One of the disciplines we as

Christian need to develop is a awareness of when God may choose to use us and a willingness to go along with God's plan.

Look what happened to the crippled man sitting outside the Temple that day. Look at verses 4-7; (read verses here). He thought he might just be able to collect a few coins, enough to pay rent for his little shack out on the edge of town or get a meager meal or two for the day. Instead, God used Peter and John to give this man something he really needed...healing, wholeness and a real sense of being alive again. Had Peter and John simply scoffed at the man as they entered the temple, nothing would have changed. The man probably would have sat there everyday for the rest of his life, and no one inside the temple would have heard about the healing work of Jesus. Yet God would not let this happen, God not only takes ordinary people and empowers them to do extraordinary things; God uses ordinary circumstances to make God's extraordinary presence known.

What we have to offer comes from our words and our actions and from a God who calls us to share these publicly. Not through dramatic displays of faith in front of 500 or 5000 people, but through acts and words of faith that go beyond those that we know are people of faith.

I know of a retired surgeon in Illinois who would ask to join his patients in prayer if the patient's pastor came to be with them before surgery. If the pastor didn't come, he would ask if he could pray with them before surgery. He told me that 9 out of 10 times people would more than welcome the prayers. What he had to offer was not only skilled hands in surgery but a faithful heart in prayer for those that he had been called to serve.

Last week, I saw God at work all over this place as I witnessed many of you welcoming and serving one another and our neighbors at the Block Party. I also saw how some people who came appeared to live in the shadows of our community. But they also seemed to see God here as they were genuinely welcomed to be a part of something offered for them. I also saw how those serving seemed to be filled with God as they served. It makes me wonder, what would it look like if Zumbro became known in Rochester for our culture of faithful hospitality? How much more may we be aware of the blessings of God around us? How much more often might we see the extraordinary works of God in the midst of our ordinary routines?

We all have something to offer, because we've all been caught by the God who loves us and loves the world. We don't have to be Peter and preach great sermons, or Abraham who wandered hundreds of miles to find his new home, or Moses who tried to do it all, but we can do what seems most natural to us, using the skills, the personality, the gifts that God has given each of us, so that God's message of salvation continues to be lived out in words and actions. It will happen in the ordinary times, through ordinary people like you and me. You just never know when God will call on you to share what you have to offer.

As we explore Acts further in the coming weeks (and just one more invitation to pick up the ZLC Text Message for next Sunday one your way out of worship today) we will continue to discover that sharing what we have to offer does change us as followers of Jesus. May we be people who trust in this extraordinary God and experience the joy of sharing with others what God has offered us. Amen.