

Acts

Lesson #3

St. Peter Arrested!

(3: 1 – 4: 31)

Review

After Jesus' resurrection he spent 40 days with his disciples, teaching them what they needed to know to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth, and he commissioned them as "Apostles" to do so. He then commanded his Apostles to wait in Jerusalem for the Holy Spirit, and he ascended into heaven, leaving them alone on the Mount of Olives. Ten days later, on the Jewish feast of Pentecost, A.D. 32—fifty days after Passover—the Holy Spirit descended from heaven, arriving in Jerusalem in a very public fashion, and on that day the Church was born as a covenant community under Grace.

Early that morning St. Peter preached his astounding "Pentecost sermon," and 3,000 people were saved that very day! Powered by the Holy Spirit, the incipient Church grew rapidly day-by-day, focused on: 1) the Apostles' teaching; 2) the fellowship of believers; 3) the breaking of bread (the Eucharist); and 4) prayer.

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Preview

The Church continues growing quickly, from 120 in the upper room after Jesus' Ascension (1: 15), to 3,000 after St. Peter's sermon at Pentecost (2: 41), to 5,000 only weeks later (4: 4). Such rapid growth raises eyebrows and quickly produces opposition. After Peter heals a crippled beggar at the Temple, the Sanhedrin dispatches guards to arrest Peter and John. Brought before the high priest and the Jewish leaders—*the same men who condemned Jesus to death*—St. Peter offers a fiery defense:

“Leaders of the people and elders: If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed.”

(4: 8-10)

This is from a man who a short while ago was afraid of a servant girl in the courtyard of the high priest. On fire with the Holy Spirit, Peter is incandescent!

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**Nicolas Poussin, *Saints Peter and John Heal the Lame Man* (oil on canvas), 1655.
Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York.**

“Now Peter and John were going up to the temple area for the three o’clock hour of prayer. And a man crippled from birth was carried and placed at the gate of the temple called “the Beautiful Gate” every day to beg for alms from the people who entered the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked for alms. But Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, ‘Look at us.’ He paid attention to them, expecting to receive something from them. Peter said, ‘I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk.’”

(3: 1-6)

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- * In Acts 2: 43 we read that after Peter's sermon at Pentecost, *"Awe came upon everyone, and many wonders and signs were done through the apostles."* Here, we see one of them: Peter and John healing the lame man.
- * As Peter and John go up the steps leading from the outer courts to the inner courts for the prayer service that accompanies the evening sacrifice, they spot a man near the "Beautiful Gate," crippled from birth, begging.

The "Beautiful Gate" is probably the Nicanor Gate, which leads into the Court of the Women, a gate of Corinthian bronze mentioned by Josephus for its exquisite workmanship, whose value "far exceeded those gates that were plated in silver and set in gold" (*History of the Jewish War*, 5. 201).



“And a man crippled from birth was carried and placed at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate.”

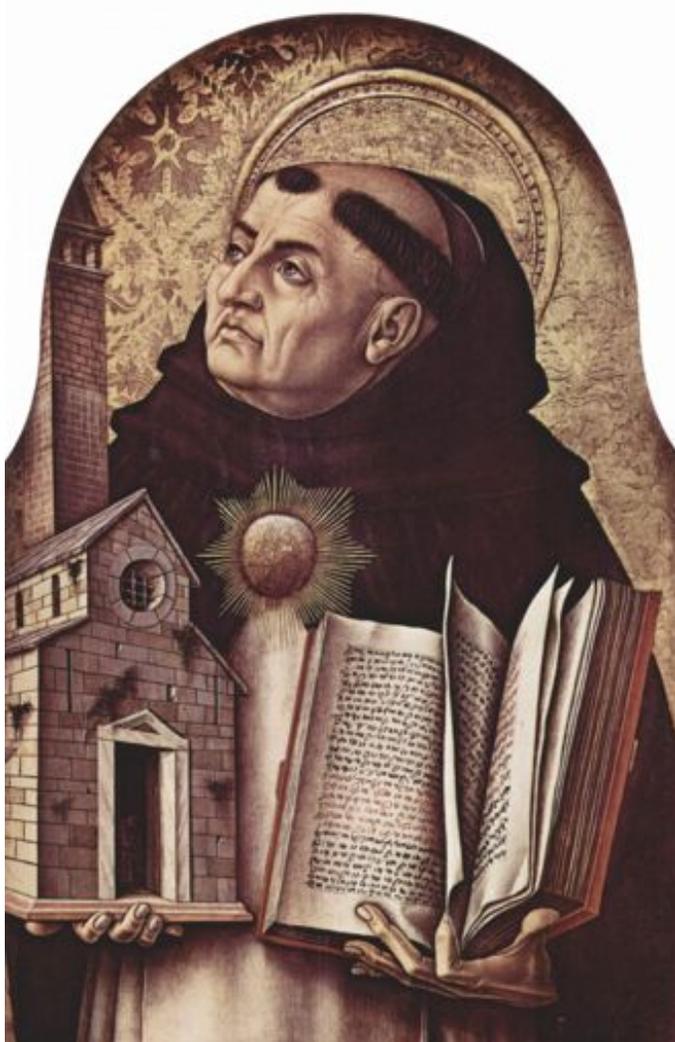
Photography by Ana Maria Vargas

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St. Peter Arrested!



Carlo Crivelli. "St. Thomas Aquinas"
(Altarpiece), 1476.
National Gallery, London.

"Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I do have I give to you: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean, rise and walk."

According to the great Jesuit scholar and exegete Cornelius à Lapide (1597-1637) in his Commentary of the *Acts of the Apostles*, St. Thomas Aquinas once called upon Pope Innocent II when the latter was counting out a large sum of money.

Pope Innocent said, "You see, Thomas, the church can no longer say, 'Silver and gold have I none.'"

"True, holy father," replied St. Thomas, "neither can she now say, 'Rise and walk.'"

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“Then Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles grew strong. He leaped up, stood, and walked around, and went into the temple with them, walking and jumping and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the one who used to sit begging at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, and they were filled with amazement and astonishment at what had happened to him.”

(3: 7-10)

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Whooh, hooo!

“As he clung to Peter and John, all the people hurried in amazement toward them in the portico called ‘Solomon’s Portico.’ When Peter saw this, he addressed the people . . .

Peter’s 2nd “Sermon”

(3: 12-26)

“You Israelites, why are you amazed at us as if we had made him walk by our own power or piety? The God of Abraham, [the God] of Isaac, and [the God] of Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus whom you handed over and denied in Pilate’s presence, when he had decided to release him. You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. The author of life you put to death, but God raised him from the dead; of this we are witnesses. And by faith in his name, this man, whom you see and know, his name has made strong, and the faith that comes through it has given him this perfect health, in the presence of all of you.

(3: 12-26)

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* Peter's 2nd "Sermon" follows a similar pattern to that of the 1st. In both cases an extraordinary event triggers amazement in the crowd. Peter then offers an explanation (here, the man born lame has placed his faith in Christ, and it is by the power of Christ that he has been healed). Peter then goes on to tie the event to the fulfillment of prophecy, and he issues a call to action.

* Referring to Jesus as God's "servant" in v. 13 may seem rather odd. The Greek word is *παῖδα*, a masculine, singular noun. Luke uses the word 5 times, once in his Gospel (9: 42) and 4 times in Acts (3: 13, 26; 4: 27; and 20: 12), meaning "servant," "child," or "young man." Here, "servant" recalls God's "Suffering Servant" of Isaiah 52: 13 - 53: 12, made clear in 3: 18.

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“Now I know, brothers, that you acted out of ignorance, just as your leaders did; but God has thus brought to fulfillment what he had announced beforehand through the mouth of all the prophets, **that his Messiah would suffer.** Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away, and that the Lord may grant you times of refreshment and send you the Messiah already appointed for you, Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the times of universal restoration of which God spoke through the mouth of his holy prophets from of old.



- * Peter emphasizes that the people and their leaders acted out of ignorance in condemning Jesus and having him crucified, making their action an *inadvertent* sin. Recall the distinction between “deliberate” and “inadvertent” sin in our study of Leviticus: one may repent of “inadvertent” sin and be forgiven. Peter urges exactly that.
- * Notice, too, that Peter now understands that there will be an interval between Jesus’ ascension and his return (“*parousia*” or “2nd coming”), and that the “universal restoration” will occur *with his return*, as Jesus taught Peter and the Apostles in Acts 1: 6-11.

“For Moses said:

‘A prophet like me will the Lord, your God, raise up for you from among your own kinsmen; to him you shall listen in all that he may say to you. Everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be cut off from the people.’

Moreover, all the prophets who spoke, from Samuel and those afterwards, also announced these days. You are the children of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your ancestors when he said to Abraham, ‘In your offspring all the families of the earth shall be blessed.’ For you first, God raised up his servant and sent him to bless you by turning each of you from your evil ways.”

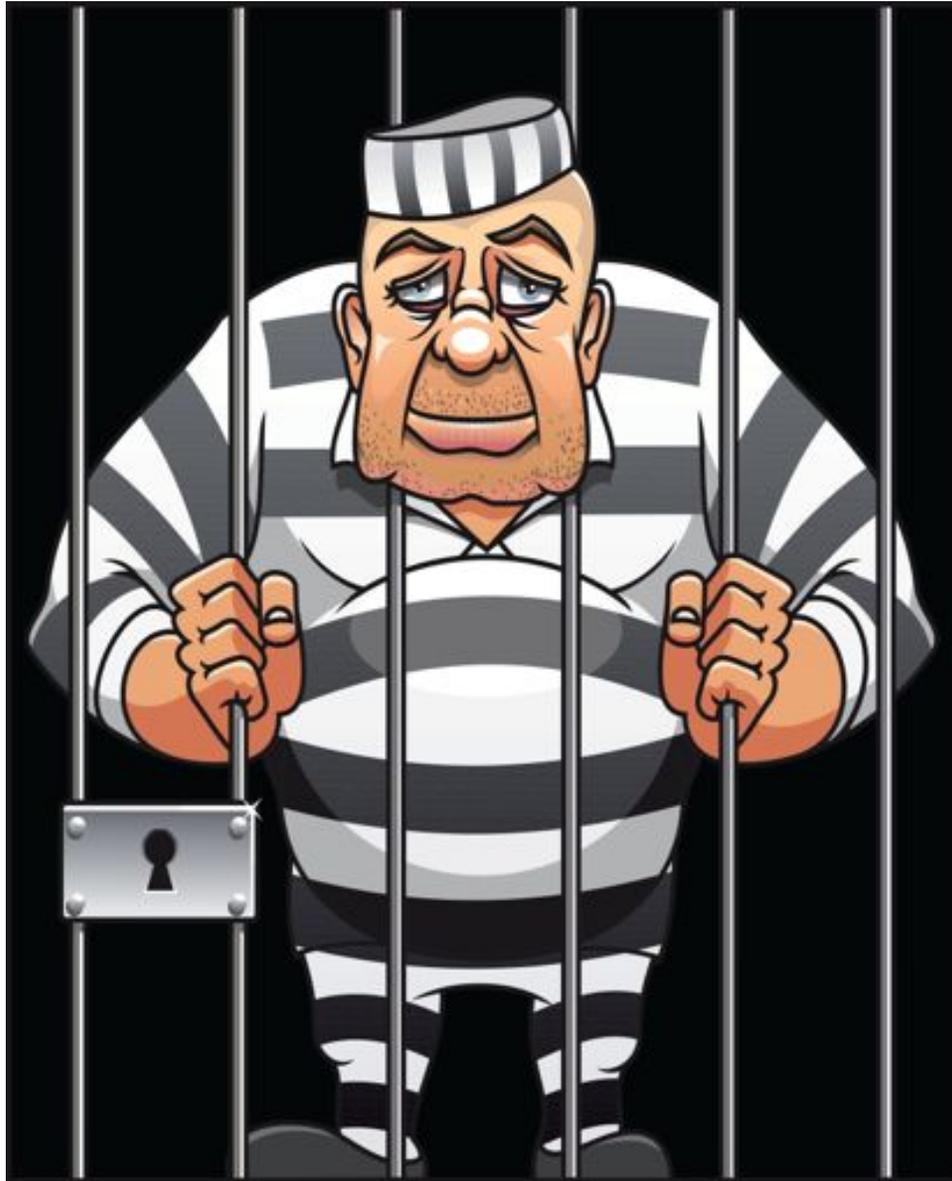
(3: 22-26)

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Peter concludes his 2nd sermon strongly by invoking Moses (Deuteronomy 18: 15), ALL of the prophets from Samuel onward, and Abraham (Genesis 12: 3).





“While they were still speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees confronted them, disturbed that they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. They laid hands on them and put them in custody until the next day, since it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word came to believe and [the] number of men grew to [about] **five thousand**.

On the next day, their leaders, elders, and scribes were assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly class. They brought them into their presence and questioned them, ‘By what power or by what name have you done this?’”

(4: 1-7)

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* Although we read that the religious leaders were “*disturbed that they [Peter and John] were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead,*” the issue is not theological, but political. Jesus had posed a grave threat to the *Pax Romana* and the fragile peace between the Jewish people, their leaders and the Roman authorities, a peace that could shatter like splintered glass at the slightest provocation, resulting in a blood bath—and indeed, that is precisely what happens in A.D.66.

* After Jesus’ crucifixion, the tension only increases. Although the festival crowds had gone home, the incipient messianic movement in Jerusalem now numbers 5,000, and Peter and John must be silenced, the movement stopped dead in its tracks.

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“Then Peter, filled with the holy Spirit, answered them, ‘Leaders of the people and elders. If we are being examined today about a good deed done to a cripple, namely, by what means he was saved, then all of you and all the people of Israel should know that it was in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead; in his name this man stands before you healed. He is ‘the stone rejected by you the builders, which has become the cornerstone.’ There is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved.”

(4: 8-12)

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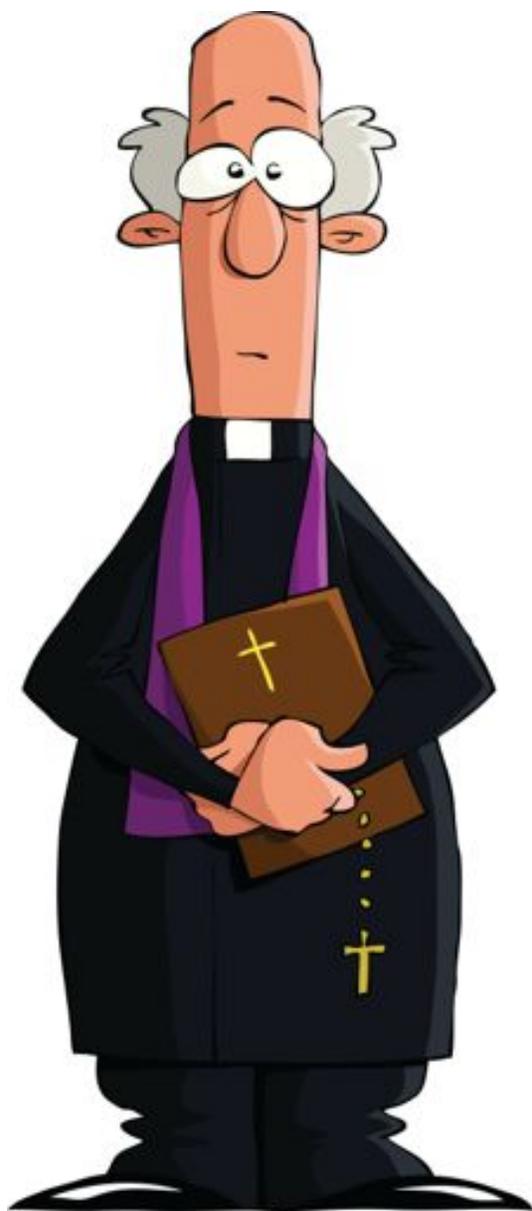


This is the 3rd time St. Peter has spoken *boldly* on behalf of Christ. This time it's not to the crowds, but to the high priest and the ruling elite.

No "political correctness" with Peter!



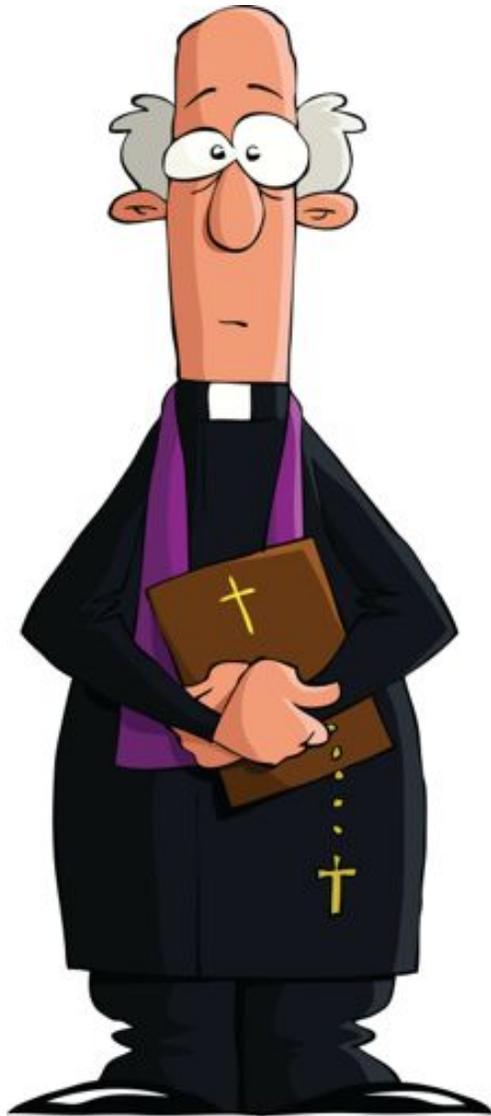
- * St. Peter is quite clear that ***“there is no salvation through anyone else, nor is there any other name under heaven given to the human race by which we are to be saved”*** (4: 12).
- * If we are to be “saved” it is solely by virtue of the shed blood of Christ on the cross, by who he is and what he did: period.
- * How we appropriate that salvation is another question entirely. Ephesians 2: 8 states: ***“[B]y grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not from you; it is the gift of God; it is not from works, so no one may boast.”*** St. Paul expresses this same idea as his thesis in his *Epistle to the Romans*, and he builds a formal argument supporting it. We will study St. Paul’s argument in depth when we reach *Romans*.



* And St. Paul is correct, we are “saved by grace through faith” in Christ; but a “saving faith” can be expressed in many ways.

* The Roman Catholic Church offers penetrating insight into the dynamics of salvation in the Vatican II document *Lumen Gentium*, in which she states that “*at all times and in every race God has given welcome to whosoever fears Him and does what is right. God, however, does not make men holy and save them merely as individuals, without bond or link between one another. Rather, it has pleased Him to bring men together as one people, a people which acknowledges Him in truth and serves Him in holiness*” (LG, 2. 9).

* Such people include the Catholic faithful; baptized Christians; and those who have not yet received the Gospel, including God’s covenant people, Israel; as well as those who acknowledge God as Creator. *LG* goes on to say, “Nor does Divine Providence deny the helps necessary for salvation to those who, without blame on their part, have not yet arrived at an explicit knowledge of God and with His grace strive to live a good life.”

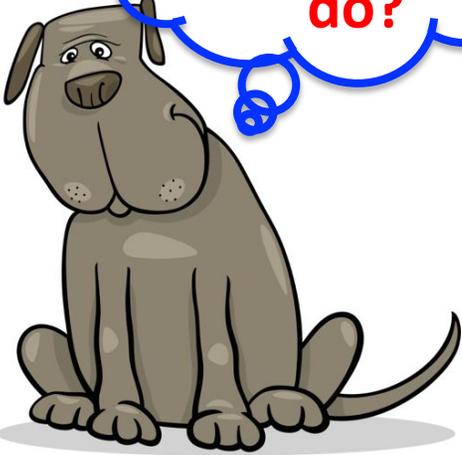


* This is not an argument for universal salvation; rather, it expresses the degree to which God wants “*everyone to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth,*” as St. Paul writes in 1 Timothy 2: 4. If that is God’s desire, then certainly God will provide the means for it to be fulfilled. Under no condition, however, will God override our freedom to accept this freely-given gift, or to reject it.

*Once again, *the shed blood of Christ on the cross is the only operative action that enables our salvation,* and we appropriate that salvation “by grace, through faith.” But, such faith can be expressed in various ways and in various times and places.



Once Peter testifies at his trial, the religious leaders are at a loss as to how to deal with the Apostles!



I wonder what they'll do?

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“Observing the boldness of Peter and John and perceiving them to be uneducated, ordinary men, they were amazed, and they recognized them as companions of Jesus. Then when they saw the man who had been cured standing there with them, they could say nothing in reply. So they ordered them to leave the Sanhedrin, and conferred with one another, saying, ‘What are we to do with these men? Everyone living in Jerusalem knows that a remarkable sign was done through them, and we cannot deny it. But so that it may not be spread any further among the people, let us give them a stern warning never again to speak to anyone in this name.’”

(4: 13-17)

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* In Peter's sermon at Pentecost, we learned that Jesus was a man commended by God "with mighty deeds, wonders, and signs which God worked through him" (2: 22).

* No person can perform a miracle; only God can. And if God performs a miracle through you, it suggests that you have a very intimate relationship with God; thus, when you speak of God, people should listen.

* The man born crippled is healed by God through Peter and John, validating their authority for what they are saying in Jerusalem. The religious leaders cannot deny it, based upon the miraculous healing.

* Consequently, all they can really do is order Peter and John not to speak of Jesus any more.

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The religious leaders
have no other options,
it seems.



Like that's
going to
work!

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“So they called them back and ordered them not to speak or to teach at all in the name of Jesus. Peter and John, however, said to them in reply, ‘Whether it is right in the sight of God for us to obey you rather than God, you be the judges. It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.’ After threatening them further, they released them, finding no way to punish them, on account of the people who were all praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing had been done was over forty years old.”

(4: 18-22)

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HIGH FIVE



“After their release they went back to their own people and reported what the chief priests and elders had told them. And when they heard it, they raised their voices to God with one accord and said, ‘Sovereign Lord, maker of heaven and earth and the sea and all that is in them, you said by the holy Spirit through the mouth of our father David, your servant:

‘Why did the Gentiles rage
and the peoples entertain folly?
The kings of the earth took their stand
and the princes gathered together
against the Lord and against his anointed.’

“Indeed, they gathered in this city against your holy servant Jesus whom you anointed, Herod and Pontius Pilate, together with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do what your hand and [your] will had long ago planned to take place. And now, Lord, take note of their threats, and enable your servants to speak your word with all boldness, as you stretch forth [your] hand to heal, and signs and wonders are done through the name of your holy servant Jesus. As they prayed the place where they were gathered shook and they were all filled with the holy Spirit and continued to speak the word of God with boldness.”

(4: 23-31)

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Questions for discussion and thought

1. How were Peter and John able to heal the man born crippled?
2. In both his 1st and 2nd sermon St. Peter quotes the Hebrew scriptures extensively as proof of Jesus' identity. How did he know what scriptures to use?
3. As the church continues to grow, expanding to 5,000 people, the Jewish religious leaders arrest Peter and John. Why?
4. When the Sanhedrin orders Peter and John to stop speaking about Jesus, what do Peter and John do?
5. After Peter and John's trial, what does the Church do in response?

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