

WHAT WE HAVE IS BETTER THAN GOLD

Acts 3:1-11

TEXT: *One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer-at three in the afternoon. Now a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God. When all the people saw him walking and praising God, they recognized him as the same man who used to sit begging at the temple gate called Beautiful, and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade.*

In Jesus' name, my fellow redeemed:

You've heard it said: Give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day. Teach a man to fish, and you will feed him for a lifetime.

That's not far from what Peter and John do one day when they were accosted by a beggar just outside the Temple courts at a gate called Beautiful: *One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer-at three in the afternoon. ... a man crippled from birth was being carried to the temple gate called Beautiful, where he was put every day to beg from those going into the temple courts. When he saw Peter and John ... he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.* This was a shameful example of the spiritual condition of the Jews. That there should be a handicapped person begging outside of the Temple gate!

King David wrote in Psalm 37: *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely...* This is not just the observation of a great king, but a divine truth revealed through David by the Holy Spirit! "The righteous" means believers in God's Savior. Believers will never be forsaken *or their children begging bread...* If David were alive to see this beggar outside the Temple, he would know that these Jews had lost their faith. What they needed, and what this poor cripple was about to receive, was the message of Jesus.

David, the inspired author of Psalm 145 also wrote: *The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time. You open your hand and satisfy the desires of every living thing.* This Scripture leads us to another conclusion concerning the Jews at the time of Peter and John. Since the Lord gives every living thing its food at the proper time, then it must follow that in addition to a gross lack of faith in Christ, there was sin and wickedness that was interfering with the gracious dispensation of God's daily bread to the people of the land. While the Jewish leaders lived lives in the lap of luxury, right outside of their Temple gate was a handicapped man reduced to begging, and they allowed this disgrace to exist!

This is not God's fault. It is the result of sin! It is the result of sin in us and the sin and wickedness of those around us. And yet, through the selfishness and greed of those ancient Jews who allowed a fellow Jew to beg outside the temple gates, God allows his suffering to serve mankind with an opportunity to hear the Gospel through Peter and John! Will they listen? The crippled beggar would!

We live in a land that is the most blessed and most generous land in the world. And we live among a people that is relatively generous. Does that mean that the United States is a Christian country? No. It means that there are many Christians living in this blessed country. I can say with David: *I was young and now I am old, yet I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread. They are always generous and lend freely...* Christians have the promise from God that He will open His hand and provide our individual needs always at the proper time. Our faith and trust in these promises cause us to be a generous people.

What we do see among us in those who are called "homeless" and destitute, are, for the most part, people who have let sin enter their lives, causing them to abuse drugs, alcohol, their husbands and wives, and

even the generous welfare system our country has established and made us support through our taxes. And Scripture does warn all people, even those who are Christian: ***When we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat."*** 2 Th 3 And even then, the government under which we are so blessed to live, this land that millions of Americans have sacrificed their lives to protect, even provides welfare to many who will not even work!

While God does indeed provide what man needs, and always at the proper time, there is one thing that the Lord has given us, his Church, that far surpasses all the wealth in the world. Jesus says to us, his Church: Preach the Gospel to all the world!

It's being said by those who are wanting us to invest our money in silver and gold, that if you can't hold it in your hand, do you REALLY own it? In other words, if your assets are only promises on paper, do they really exist? Our 401k's and the like, are out there, somewhere, there is always the nervous feeling that if the stock market should crash, we will have nothing.

Peter and John had money. But they did not have enough money to give this man what they were about to give him. They were about to give him two things: First, and best, they were going to give him Jesus. Secondly, they were going to give him legs so that he could go to work for himself and never to have to beg again. The Bible says: ***When he saw Peter and John about to enter, he asked them for money. Peter looked straight at him, as did John. Then Peter said, "Look at us!" So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them. Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."*** By introducing this man to his Jesus, his Savior God, he was united to the Triune God by faith, and to all the precious promises God gives. First and foremost is the forgiveness of sins which means that we have eternal life and salvation. Secondly, we are a member of God's family, the Church, upon which God shows special mercies and grace, the kind you and I have been so blessed to enjoy, day by day by day.

That is the work of THIS church. We have money, but then again, we don't have any money. Why? We give it away -- not to worldly charities, for that is the work of the society in which we live. We give it to the preaching of the Gospel. Our goal is not to amass a pile of silver and gold, but to put it to work in the Lord's Kingdom.

And this is all by faith. For what we have is worth more than all the world itself. It is the forgiveness of sins through Jesus. It is the saving power of Holy Baptism. It is the body and blood of Jesus in the Lord's Supper, tasted under the elements of bread and wine, but by the power of the Holy Spirit, Jesus' true body and blood that we also eat and drink in this sacrament is a means by which the Holy Spirit strengthens our faith and keeps us with Jesus Christ until life everlasting. Are these gifts truly there? God says that they are and by faith we are assured of the truth that we have what only God's Church offers.

We spend a large proportion of our silver and gold in maintaining a Lutheran Elementary School. I mention this often because our schools are under assault by the devil in these days. He isn't using drugs and sex, but he is so happy when we do not realize and tell the world what it is that our LES provides. Public schools have lots of money and lots of programs and offer children a fine education. But they do not have what the Church alone is able to provide: a day by day spiritual diet of the Holy Spirit's power through the Gospel message of what Jesus has done for us so that we might live forever.

I mention this about our school because school begins in the next academic year tomorrow. And another year of giving God's children the greatest assets of life: the Word of God that is what Peter and John teaches us is the most important thing to hold in your heart. So we gladly give our silver and gold to maintain what God has given us for our children.

The beggar could walk again. He now knew the name from which the power of salvation is found. Remaining nameless in history, he no doubt got a job, lived a normal life as a Christian, working and telling others about his Savior, worshipping and teaching his children about Jesus. Until, one day, his legs became immobile again. Stiff and in a casket, they would lie until the Lord's Great Day of the resurrection of all the dead. And so will our legs become paralyzed by death. But because this Jesus whose name we trust and proclaim, we live forever and on that Great Day of Judgment, join that ancient beggar in the resurrection of all the dead to sing and dance forever in God's Paradise.

Never forget this: What we have to offer as God's Church, is better than all the gold and money in the world! Amen