

I sometimes wonder if we are living in the days of the apostles again? I can see certain similarities with ourselves and the early Church. Or more precisely, I think we live in a spiritual environment that was similar to early Church. What do I mean when I say this? I'm not saying this because miracles and prophecies are being fulfilled, in the same way they were back then, although they are. Nor do I say this because sin is so prevalent and accepted these days, just as it was in Biblical times. I don't see the similarities just because we, like the five thousand early Christians who grew to millions and millions, are eagerly waiting with expectation the return of Jesus Christ at the end of time.

No, I think we are living in the days of the apostles again, because just as the message of a crucified, risen Messiah was new and misunderstood then, so it is now. Just as only a small minority believed that Christ had come then; these days only comparatively few people have really heard the news about Jesus, and truly believe in him. And just as in the days of Peter and Paul, people are still waiting for a Messiah: A financial Christ, a political messiah, and a saviour from whatever trouble ails them.

In this post-Christian era in which we live, the text for today is dynamic and alive, and it's a simple message. Our text from Acts 3 offers a simple message; but is this not what the apostles preached back in the first century? ***What we need is the boldness of Peter to say three things: 1) Don't look at us (v12). 2) Look at God and his Son (v13 to 18), and 3) Look at yourself (v17 to 19).*** Why did Peter stand up and boldly deliver this message? He said it because a spectacular miracle had just occurred right outside the temple. Peter and John had been accosted by a beggar asking for money, and while they didn't have any money, they commanded the man in the name of Christ; to stand up and walk.

And now the man was no longer begging for money; now he was jumping and shouting for joy. No longer did people look on him with pity, but with wide eyed amazement. He was no longer crippled and helpless. He had been transformed into fit and able man. He was healed and he was clinging to Peter and John. Peter says: *Don't Look At Us!*

After witnessing this undeniable miracle, people came running to Peter and John to see that else they could do with their great power. ***Don't look at us, said Peter; we didn't do anything!*** Peter explained to the crowd: *Don't look at us, this is a gift from God!* Paul encountered the same human adoration when he and Barnabas healed a crippled man. The priest of the pagan temple was all set to offer sacrifices to them until Paul told him: *Don't look at us!* When God uses us to do great exploits in his kingdom, this should be our attitude: *It's not me. It's Jesus!* Even as powerful as Paul was, he was confident of this: *Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God.* (2 Cor 3:5). I love juxtaposing these two verses, and I quote them to myself each morning: *Apart from God I can do nothing!* And yet; *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me!* Peter asked; *Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? We work for Jesus!*

Look At The Son! Look at the names Peter and John used to describe their Master in our text: God's servant, Holy and Righteous One, Author of Life, and God's Christ. Instead of promoting themselves, they proclaim Jesus' name in terms that describe his purpose and beauty. Peter and John didn't try to impress their listeners; they just spoke the truth about Jesus: *He's not dead anymore. His Father said, 'Get up, arise,' and he did!. It's his resurrected power that empowered us, as conduits for the miracle you've just witnessed. It wasn't our power that made this man walk, it was Jesus!* As Christians, all our talking and planning and anything we claim for ourselves; must lift up Jesus.

More than that, our whole lives should be lived as if we have Jesus working us from within. It is easy for us to look back over the past three or four years at Thornliebank and say how well we have done. But we have achieved nothing that was not first part of God's plan for us. We have come together because of God's in-working in our lives. When we look at our successes and achievements, we should look to Jesus and give Him the glory.

Look At Yourself! When we've taken the focus from ourselves and put it on the One who died for all; then we can rightly tell others to look to themselves to see what God may be saying to them. Peter didn't just tell his listeners to consider doing so; he made them do it and he wasn't particularly gentle about it! He displayed early church boldness to confront the people with their sin. He didn't mince his words when he said: *You disowned Jesus and you killed Life*. Then Peter gave three examples of characters whom the people despised or looked down upon. He said: *They are more righteous than you!*

Exhibit one was Pilate: He always gets the public blame and his name is even in the Apostle's Creed, but he's better than you are, says Peter. You disowned God's Son before Pilate *though he had decided to let him go!* You used Pilate as a scapegoat, but not anymore. All the guilt is yours. Look at you; you are more guilty than despicable Pilate! Peter has more condemnation, he brings up exhibit two in murderous Barabbas, who was freed instead of Jesus. *You disowned the Holy and Righteous one, and asked that a murderer be released to you. How could you?"* Peter grieves. You set a filthy insurrectionist free and casually murdered the Christ. Look at yourselves; you're worse than Barabbas!

And still Peter wasn't done with his scathing rebuke. He held up one more example to show the people how far they had strayed.

Exhibit three: Peter points to the man just healed. It is by faith in the name of Jesus that he is well; faith in Jesus is the reason this man is walking around. He has something you don't have and you need it all the more! You're crippled in your spirit. Only Jesus can heal you too but you have to trust in Him. Look at yourselves: Will you believe like this delirious man?

If we are honest, when we look inside ourselves we will find ignorance and lack of knowledge. Peter is bold in addressing sin, yet like the Saviour; Peter is also bold in extending mercy. We may be ignorant and guilty but there is hope. We might be rebellious and scornful but there's hope! We might even love to pretend we are worthy and respectable. But look at the cross that we built and then filled.

Look at what our sin did on the cross, and as we gaze upon the cross, we will find the forgiveness that is available to each of us if we will but turn to God. The very things we are guilty of are why Jesus died. Our text from Acts 3, says that our sins will be wiped out! What wonderfully good news! No more washing our hands like Pilate. No more un-repentant guilt like Barabbas. And the healed man's faith is lacking no longer. Do you know what it means for sins to be wiped out? It doesn't mean it was crumpled up and thrown away. Wiped out does not mean saved in a file on the hard drive on God's computer. Sin is not even burned in a fire where only ashes remain, its completely vanished.

When Jesus died on the cross, and when we are forgiven at Baptism or at the Lord's Table, it's as if our sins are forever erased with no shadows or residue remaining. Our record is like a brand new clear page! What Peter's hearers would have used for writing was papyrus and the ink used had no acid in it. Therefore, it did not sink into the papyrus, like our modern ink does.

One could simply take a sponge and wipe it away. **Colossians 2:13 to 14 says: *He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the written code, with its regulations, that was against us and that stood opposed to us; he took it away, nailing it to the cross.***

Who do we know that is ignorant to the claims and truth of Jesus? There are plenty of people I know who don't know Christ. And remember, that God has commanded us to share the good news of Christ with them. We have a beautiful God given opportunity to tell others the truth about Jesus Christ.

As an airplane was filling with passengers before takeoff, a lady saw a vacant seat beside a minister: *Is this seat saved?* she asked. *I don't know*, he replied, *but I am. Sit down and let me tell you about it! **It's not me. It's Jesus! And everybody needs to be told about Him!** Amen*

(1601 words)