

Acts 3:1-10

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, 'Look at us.' And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, 'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.' And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. All the people saw him walking and praising God, and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

Luke 24:13-35

Now on that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem, and talking with each other about all these things that had happened. While they were talking and discussing, Jesus himself came near and went with them, but their eyes were kept from recognizing him. And he said to them, 'What are you discussing with each other while you walk along?' They stood still, looking sad. Then one of them, whose name was Cleopas, answered him, 'Are you the only stranger in Jerusalem who does not know the things that have taken place there in these days?' He asked them, 'What things?' They replied, 'The things about Jesus of Nazareth, who was a prophet mighty in deed and word before God and all the people, and how our chief priests and leaders handed him over to be condemned to death and crucified him. But we had hoped

that he was the one to redeem Israel. Yes, and besides all this, it is now the third day since these things took place. Moreover, some women of our group astounded us. They were at the tomb early this morning, and when they did not find his body there, they came back and told us that they had indeed seen a vision of angels who said that he was alive. Some of those who were with us went to the tomb and found it just as the women had said; but they did not see him.’ Then he said to them, ‘Oh, how foolish you are, and how slow of heart to believe all that the prophets have declared! Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and then enter into his glory?’ Then beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them the things about himself in all the scriptures.

As they came near the village to which they were going, he walked ahead as if he were going on. But they urged him strongly, saying, ‘Stay with us, because it is almost evening and the day is now nearly over.’ So he went in to stay with them. When he was at the table with them, he took bread, blessed and broke it, and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened, and they recognized him; and he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, ‘Were not our hearts burning within us while he was talking to us on the road, while he was opening the scriptures to us?’ That same hour they got up and returned to Jerusalem; and they found the eleven and their companions gathered together. They were saying, ‘The Lord has risen indeed, and he has appeared to Simon!’ Then they told what had happened on the road, and how he had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread.

Last Saturday many people in Olney opened their front door to find a gift on the doorstep. These gifts were of chocolate eggs in various sizes and flowers, mostly daffodils. The person who discreetly left the gift remained anonymous, but every one had a label attached stating ‘Olney is Kind’. It was in the name of that group that the gifts

were distributed, occasionally with the addition 'A random act of kindness'.

It was a lovely idea and I must admit that one thought I had was, 'Why couldn't the church family of St Peter and St Paul have done that? And I remembered similar occasions – when spare bunches of daffodils were taken round the coffee shops after our Mothering Sunday service with the comment 'A gift from St Peter And St Paul' – something suggested over coffee on the spur of the moment. Also how during the Palm Sunday procession one year palm crosses were placed behind the windscreen wipers of parked cars, and, since it happened to be the Farmers Market that year, they were presented to stall holders and customers alike, causing some interesting discussions. So what had prevented our connection as a congregation to our neighbours here in Olney?

Then I realised something which was highlighted in the interesting article in the 'Times' newspaper which I reproduced for Monday's 'Thought for the Day'.

Across the nation, Christians have applied their faith by acts of kindness towards their neighbours and communities.

In other words, the 'random acts of kindness' undertaken under the banner of 'Olney is Kind' were also being undertaken by members of our church family, quietly and inconspicuously demonstrating their faith to their neighbours, especially to those who were lonely, fearful or grieving. What has been lacking is any kind of organization, any attempt to make it plain that these acts were Christian acts of kindness by the people of St Peter and St Paul. Gifts which I have received, some left anonymously, I know were from members of our church family, though there was no label attached to tell me so. In order to proclaim that 'communal identity' mentioned in the article we would need that coffee time chat to discuss and bounce ideas off one another. And that has been denied us for over a year.

It can be very important to make plain under what banner you are acting, what name is being used to support your action. I think as a church, we might have missed a trick, but as we heard in our first reading Peter and John did not.

If we are looking at events chronologically it may seem strange to hear of the apostle's interaction with the lame man, an event which occurred after the explosion of faith at Pentecost. Yet here we are in Easter week, our Gospel reading an account of Jesus' appearance to two travellers on the Emmaus road. But during this week we are exploring faith and the effect it had on those involved. The travellers on the Emmaus road were overjoyed and filled with wonder when Jesus had been made known to them in the breaking of the bread, their excitement giving them the energy to get up and return to Jerusalem to tell the eleven disciples what had happened. Here Peter and John had such overpowering faith in Jesus that, in his name, they commanded the lame man to get up and walk:

In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, Peter commands, stand up and walk.

And all the people who recognized him as one asking for alms because of his disability *were filled with wonder and amazement.* Such is the power of the name of Jesus.

This is significant because it is the first healing miracle achieved by the apostles which is described in detail. At the end of chapter two we are told that many signs and wonders are being done by the apostles, but none is specified. Here we are able to witness for ourselves the power which has been given to them. And there is something quite thrilling about those words of Peter, commanding with great confidence, in the name of Jesus. Significant, too, since we have the memory of the broken Peter, who denied his Lord when it came to the crunch, despite his previous protestations. The power of the Spirit which filled all the disciples at Pentecost was not a

temporary gift which enabled Peter to proclaim the Resurrection to the crowds in Jerusalem – it was something which stayed with them.

Such confidence – Peter was in no doubt as he took the lame man's hand that he would be healed, able to walk.

It is that confidence that can be ours, too. I don't mean that we will be able to perform healing miracles, but we can overcome that inbuilt inhibition which can prevent us from talking about our faith, putting that faith into action, so that people can see the power of the Resurrection in what we say and do.

Those Christian acts of kindness to which I referred earlier are a case in point. Maybe we can't access that communal identity, organize activities in the name of St Peter and St Paul, but we can do something much more important. As we leave an anonymous gift, or perform a particular act of kindness we can remind ourselves – and, maybe, sometimes others – that that they are being done in the Name of Jesus of Nazareth

Amen

[Thelma Shacklady]