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in the Season after Pentecost

### Jesus' Compassion Pictures His Grace

Jesus cares about our physical health. He knows our aches and pains and supplies his wisdom and love to our illnesses. During his ministry he had compassion on those in distress or disabled and we observe his gentle care in the Gospel for today. The Savior's care for our bodies always has a greater goal, however: he desires to free us from the disease of sin and the prognosis of death.

<b>First Reading</b>	<b>Isaiah 35:4-7a</b> The prophet foretells that the Savior will turn sadness to joy.
<b>Second Reading</b>	<b>Acts 3:1-10</b> Peter heals a lame man and points him to Christ.
<b>Gospel</b>	<b>Mark 7:31-37</b> With non-verbal compassion Jesus leads a deaf man to faith.
<b>Sermon</b>	<b>Acts 3:1-10</b>

"What is in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." This line from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* holds an interesting truth: that names simply refer to the person or thing that is named. In this example, you can call a rose whatever you want, but the characteristics of a rose, here the sweetness of its smell, won't change. Interestingly, the Bible has a similar observation about Jesus. Though he has many names, there is a power to his name that belongs to the person of Christ: a power that can change hearts and lives and cause praise to abound.

**Jesus' Name Has Power.**  
It gives us what we need  
So that we can praise him.

- 1 -

Our reading is set in the earliest stage of the New Testament church. Jesus had only recently ascended into heaven and the miracle at Pentecost was not very long ago. And still, the people of the New Testament church, those who knew Jesus had died and rose for their sins, went to the temple and prayed like they had before Jesus fulfilled the law.

So what we see in this scene to begin is not that surprising. You have two apostles, John and Peter, going to the temple to pray for worship. That makes sense. There was a man there who was crippled from birth and was begging for money. This, too, is not an uncommon sight. There was no public welfare system. If the man did not have a family able to support him, he would be forced to beg for money. And there was even a command in place from the Old Testament in which God expected his people to care for those who were poor and unable to help themselves. What developed was a system of almsgiving in the temple grounds. Good Jews would want to give money to the poor so what better place to go to ask for alms if you're in need than the temple at the time of prayer when faithful Jews would stream by. The man

asked Peter and John for money, as he probably asked everyone who passed: without really paying attention to whom he was talking, hoping that someone would give him something. Then, Peter and John looked at the man and said, "Look at us!"

Up to this point, everything seemed normal. But then Peter says something the man didn't expect. Peter said, "**I don't have any money for you.**" Then why waste my time, he thinks as his heart sinks a little. But Peter is not finished talking. "**What I do have I give you.**" Great, more scraps, maybe some of cloth or food maybe. Food is food. But that's not what Peter offers. Instead, the crippled man hears a name that he recognizes: we are told just a little while later than this man was a believer in Jesus. Peter says, "**In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.**" That is not what he was expecting when he woke up that day, you can be sure of it. Without missing a beat, Peter reaches down and helps the man up, but he isn't helping for long. Strength appears where it had never been and the man, who was a cripple just moments before, begins to walk, and jump! This man did not ask for use of his legs. He didn't expect it. And yet God could see his need and sent his servant Peter to heal his broken body. This is the grace that God has: that he sees a need and removes that need, unasked and unearned. This is the grace of a loving and caring God.

This man thought that he needed money, but his need ran much deeper. His need was even deeper than his inability to walk. His need ran right to the very core of who he was as a person. And what was wrong with him is the same thing that is wrong with you. Maybe you walk just fine. Maybe you don't feel like you have a deep need. Maybe you think that you can track all of the troubles in your life to the root. Money troubles? Well, that was because of a poor financial decision when you were younger. Pain in your body? Well, the doctors have an answer as to both what can be wrong and maybe even what they can do to fix your problem. It all seems so neat and simple. There doesn't seem to be a problem that the world doesn't have at least one solution for. But your need runs deep, it runs into the very core of your being. It corrupts everything that you do: every idea that you think, every word that you speak, and every action that you make is tainted with vile, ugly, damnable sin. And the worst part about it is that we don't even know how bad our sin truly is. How often do you reflect on your depravity? How often do you see tragedy in your life or in the life of another and think, "Oh, there is sin?" Or, more likely, do you simply shake your head and say, "That is just life, I guess. *so la vie. so is life.*" Even though we don't see it, and often ignore it, God sees the depth of our sin. He sees the depravity that we live in and are oblivious to. He knows just how deep our need runs.

What does God do when he sees that need? Does he do what we deserve and turn his back on us, sentencing us to the deserved damnation that he promised? That is what we might expect, but God did the unexpected. He sent his Son to take on your sin. The depth and breadth of your sin, in combination with all the sin in all the world throughout history, and he took it with him to the cross. On Good Friday, the sin which Jesus bore was so great that the sun stopped shining, and the Son of God suffered the eternal punishment of all sins for you and by doing so he removed your need. But his grace and love didn't stop there. He knew that you needed more than simply a removal of all your sins, you needed a perfect life. God demanded perfection, and so Jesus, when he rose from the grave, sealed in your name his own perfect life, death, and resurrection. He offered to you his life in place of yours. You would take his perfect life and he would take your sin. This is the grace that Jesus offers to you. This is the grace that is yours. It is a gift given to you to address your need, to remove all worry and doubt in your mind, and to bring you into the family of God. The name of Jesus is now supercharged with all of God's grace because of all that he has done for you. And how was this grace given to you? It was given by Jesus' name at your baptism when his name was spoken as the water was poured over you. His name is powerful to save. Forgiveness is still offered to you in the body and blood of Jesus given with the bread and wine in communion. Jesus' name is powerful. It forgives you of your sins and opens your eyes to see God's unending grace for you.

- 2 -

As God's grace comes into focus in your life, as you recognize just how gracious of a God that you have, Jesus' name continues to have power: the power to create praise. When Peter spoke Jesus' name and gave that man the ability to walk, the man didn't respond by saying, "Gee, thanks, I guess I have to go find a job now." No, he jumped for joy! He praised God! Jesus' name created praise that was recognizable to those around him. They knew by his praise that God had been gracious to him.

What exactly is praise? Praise is simply the believing heart's response to the grace of God. Jesus' name has power to create life in us, but its power continues in a believer's heart to create praise for that very same name. It is a praise that declares to God and everyone all the good things that God has done and just how powerful Jesus' name is because of it.

Do you remember the psalm that we sang together today? We sang "Praise the Lord" but then we recounted the marvelous things that God has done. True praise in God is declaring to God and to anyone and everyone who will listen all of the grace that God has poured out on us. Whether in the form of a song, a poem, or simply the spoken word, declaring what great things God has done is the highest form of praise that we can offer to the Lord.

Names don't usually carry anything of themselves, only as much as the thing to which the name refers. A rose can be called a pretty flower, a red flower, or by no name at all and it still smells delightful. Jesus' name, though, well that is a name that has the power to bring life as it has brought life to your heart. The power of his name comes from his perfect life and death which he gave you the benefit of. God be praised! Amen.

Vicar Joshua Busch