

The Rev. Michael J. Bridge
Sermon- Acts 3:12-26
Sunday, April 23, 2017

The Power of a miracle

1. In 1993 a young girl named Polly was kidnapped. For some personal reasons, the actress, Winona Ryder, took a deep interest in the case and became an advocate for Polly and her family. The Polly Klaas case was a sad one, ending with the murder of the girl. There are dozens, if not hundreds of kidnappings yearly, and very few catch the attention of the nation. This was one of the reasons Winona Ryder got involved. She wanted to raise the profile of the story in an effort to bring Polly home and/or to bring swift justice to those responsible.
2. These cases are all tragedies. Every single missing or exploited child deserves our attention and our prayers. The reality is that we just aren't and can't be aware of all of them. When a celebrity gets involved- especially like Winona Ryder did, in that she wasn't a paid advocate for the cause- it does bring more attention to the story. The celebrity's involvement alone seems to lend enough clout to the story to make the media pay attention; and what the media runs with is what we will ultimately know about.
3. I know it is kind of a strange comparison, but this is much like the power of miracles that we see in the NT. They added something to what was going on that made people take notice. The disciples could preach the gospel all day and maybe people would listen, maybe not. But throw in a miracle and all of a sudden the crowds are gathered. The same was true with Jesus' ministry. It isn't that the words don't have power; it is just that providing the miracles adds a level of credibility or clout that makes people pay attention.
 - a. The religious leaders knew this, both Jesus and the disciples for healing people. They saw how the crowds would gather after such an act, and how the people would then hang on every word.
4. Over and over again in the NT we see miracles serve as precursors to preaching. Our passage from Acts today is an example. As Peter and John were passing through the Beautiful Gate of the temple, Peter healed a man who couldn't walk. Look at the amazing impact this had on their day's work.
 - a. ⁹ And all the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him. ¹¹ While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people."
5. That is the power of a miracle. The beginning of chapter 3 tells us that Peter and John were going to the temple for the hour of prayer. Thus, they likely weren't headed there for preaching, but for praying. You can see it in verse 12; Peter saw the opportunity because of the miracle, so he took it.

Making people face the truth

1. The power wasn't just that the people gathered around Peter and John; but also, that they allowed Peter to speak very difficult truth to them. Peter, seeing that he had the attention of the crowd, didn't hold back. He didn't ask how many people wanted to accept Jesus into their heart. He didn't tell them that Jesus would fulfill all of their dreams. He didn't tell them that if they each had enough faith, then they, too, would find healing.
2. Peter told them that they were responsible for killing Jesus- the Christ, the one that Moses prophesied would come. He doesn't let them off the hook. He even tells them that they killed the "Author of Life." They would understand that they were being accused of killing God himself.

3. He doesn't simply bury them in accusations, though.
 - a. ¹⁷ "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago."
 - b. He presents them with their sins, then calls them to repentance, that their sins may be blotted out and they can receive fulfillment of all the promises God had made through his prophets.
4. Even as he was presenting the good news of Jesus Christ, he also showed the consequences of rejecting the forgiveness God offers. Quoting Moses about Jesus, the coming prophet, Peter says, "And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people." That is quite the warning to a Jew. To reject God's great Prophet is to be cut off from God's people.
5. All of that was part of the message Peter preached.
6. We have a similar message, altered only in that we aren't, generally, speaking to Jews, but to Gentiles. We have the message that we have all sinned and fallen short of the glory of God. None of us is righteous, not even one. All of our sins are responsible for nailing Jesus to the cross. Yet, that same death that we are responsible for provides the very atonement we need, so that we can be forgiven by God. We have two options: we accept the mercy and grace God has given us in the cross, inheriting the glories of the resurrection. Or we reject his gift, and we are resurrected to eternal destruction, cut off from the people of God forever.
7. That can be a hard message to share. Seeker-sensitive churches are always seeking to water it down. Liberal churches try to take away all the offense of the cross, but diminish it to a powerless symbol. We often hope that just by being good people, that will be enough for others to convert and follow our God. The truth is, people need to hear the good, the bad, and the consequences of their choices.
8. Peter and John were able to lead into such rhetoric by the power of a miracle that captivated the crowds. I don't know the degree to which God is going to allow us to each do such miracles. I do know that many of us have miraculous experiences that we should not waste.
 - a. For example, Zach's story is incredibly powerful. Not just surviving the cancer he had, but the visions of hell and the realization that he was not on the right track. That is the kind of story that will captivate the audience so that they listen. Once they are listening, it is important to say something worth their hearing- which is the message I mentioned above.
 - b. I am not picking on Zach, laying a responsibility on him. I am using it as an example. Many of us have experiences or stories from our lives or our friends' and loved ones' lives, that are powerful and, through sharing them, would give us an audience to share the gospel.
9. My hope is that we recognize the power of those miracles and experiences, and that we use them to share with the crowds the message they need to hear.