

Acts 3: 1-19a

A different type of sermon – three imaginative retellings from the perspective of characters in the reading, and a summary at the end.

Kate Day

The Passer-by

This is my story.

I was in a hurry to get to prayers. I saw a couple of men talking to the disabled beggar who sits by the gate. There was a bit of a crowd gathering, but I didn't want to be late so I kept going.

When I got into the Temple Court there was a commotion, and I turned to have a look. The beggar was leaping about and praising God loudly. The men were still with him.

Lots of people went to see what was going on. I stopped for a moment and watched. I could hear one of the men saying that the beggar had been healed by believing in Jesus of Nazareth, who he called the Messiah. I'm happy with the way I worship God now, so I walked off to join the prayers. Some stayed and listened, but that's their story.

This is my story.

The Man who was healed

This is my story....

Timing is everything. Just before 3pm, the time of afternoon prayers – that's the time to be taken to the main entrance to the Temple. Lots of folk passing by, and if we made enough commotion, I got noticed and one or two of them would show how good they were by throwing a few coins in my direction. Do I sound cynical? Perhaps that's because I was. My life was less than half a life, less than a tenth of a life. From day one I'd been a burden – weak, sickly, couldn't walk. Couldn't earn a proper living more like. Or join in, be part of things, be loved. But who noticed that? When everyone else treats you as a nobody, thinks you'll never amount to anything, you begin to believe it. Begin to live as if it's true.

Let me tell you here and now, it's not true. It's a lie. We are all valuable. All important. We all matter to God, more than we will ever imagine.

Let me tell you how I know.

That day, I was taken to the Temple as usual. I called out to these two guys as they were passing. They turned and glanced towards me, and - here's the funny thing – it was almost as if something caught their attention, because they stopped walking, and looked at me properly. Really looked. At me. Not the beggar, but me, real me. One of them spoke to me

“In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah,” he began.

It's quite hard to explain, but I felt as if I was being invited to set aside not just the physical problem with my legs, but all the negative thoughts about being useless and worthless. I'd heard of this Jesus of Nazareth, of course - who hadn't, how he'd done great healings - but as the guy said these words I realised He had the power to change my life. All I had to do was trust him.

“In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, the Messiah, rise up and walk” the guy finished.

And I did. It was as if all the things that held me back just fell away. My legs were healed, and I knew that I mattered to God. Actually, that was the important thing. The legs were a bonus. I was free – free from everyone else's opinions and from my own shame and self-loathing! God cared about **me**! I couldn't contain my joy. Must have looked a right wally, jumping and shouting in the Temple courts. Drew quite a crowd it did. The two guys, Peter and John, they were called, did all the talking. But that's their story.

This is my story.

Peter

This is my story.

John and me were going to the Temple to pray, like we always did, every afternoon. Since the Spirit came, I felt close to Jesus all the time, but there were something special about going to prayers. Perhaps it were cos it were a bit of the old routine in a life which were a bit mad, if I'm honest.

We were going in through the gate when I heard a voice – well two voices actually. The first were the beggar, shouting for money. The second were Jesus' voice. How did I know it were him? Well, I lived with him for three years, and you get to know a voice when you spend that long wi' someone. It were Jesus' voice, inside me, saying, “Look at him.”

So I did. And I remembered watching Jesus healing people just like him, and I knew Jesus wanted this man to be set free. So I said that Jesus had told me to do it on his behalf, and I told the man to get up. I put out my hand to help him, and the next thing I knew his legs and ankles were strong and he was jumping and shouting.

We went into the Temple Court and people came running over. They thought I had done it, so I had to say, “Hang on a bit, it weren't me, it were Jesus what did this. That Jesus what

you murdered, but what God raised from the dead. We, me and John here, we've seen him, and he's definitely alive. You should be ashamed of what you did. Stop being so thick, leave your old ways behind and follow him."

I did the talking, but John were with me all the time, backing me up. Jesus gave me the words to say – that were grand. But I know I couldn't ha' said them wi'out John helping. It were like when Jesus sent us out to practise, when he were still with us. Always wi' a mate.

Any road, this is my story.

Our story

So, three stories about one story. Of course, they are all imagined, but they all fit in with the account given in Acts. All are the sorts of statements that witnesses to the event might have made.

What do we make of them?

First we heard from the passer-by. I guess you could say that this was a proper witness statement, because he just described what he had seen. No comment, no emotions. Just facts.

But I felt so sorry that he "didn't want to get involved." I would so much have liked him to go over to find out what was happening, to lift up his eyes from the old routine, to hear the joyful Good News about Jesus. To find out that we can never get to the end of knowing God.

Who knows though, what might have been the result of him telling others the limited amount he saw. According to Acts, by the following day the religious leaders are saying that "everyone in Jerusalem knows" about this "outstanding miracle." I'm guessing the passer-by told one or two of them his story. And Acts also tells us that as a result of what happened that day many more people believed in Jesus.

I hope the passer-by spoke to someone to find out more. I hope he was one of the new believers. I'd hate to think that he missed out.

Next we heard from the beggar. What a story he had to tell. Healed not just from his physical ailment, but from all the years of negative thinking. Of thinking that he'd "never amount to anything." That he "wasn't good enough." Jesus shattered all that. Showed him how much he is loved. Gave him new hope and new purpose. But how much courage did it take to respond to the invitation Jesus offered through Peter?

Acts tells us that the following day he was "bearing witness" by being with Peter and John when they were being questioned by the religious leaders. He was demonstrating what God had done for him. Beyond that, we don't know what happened to him, but by then there

was a community of at least 5,000 believers. It's quite hard to imagine that he wasn't one of them.

And then we heard from Peter. A changed man. Changed by his experience of letting Jesus down and then being restored. Changed by the power of the Holy Spirit - the spirit of Jesus - living within him. He was so used to being with Jesus that he recognised his voice when he heard it. So used to following Jesus, that he did what he knew his master wanted him to do.

And by now, humble enough to recognise that it wasn't about him, it was about Jesus. He was acting on Jesus' authority - "in the name of Jesus."

And also humble - and realistic - enough, to recognise that he needed human help and support too. Jesus called a team of disciples. He sent them out in pairs. He frequently left them to talk amongst themselves and to try to figure out what he was about. And here's the important thing - they often got it wrong. But they muddled on, and miraculously, Jesus used them to share his good news to the next generation, and then to the next and right on down to us. Can we too be as humble and realistic as Peter, and recognise that we need to talk to other believers about God, to learn from them, and to help them to learn in return? Not head knowledge, but heart experience of the reality of God. To encourage and build each other up.

Three stories -

The passer-by, who told his story, but missed out.

The man who was healed, who was brave enough to respond to the invitation, and discovered he was good enough after all.

Peter, who recognised Jesus' voice, and that he needed both the Spirit and human help to follow Jesus.

Maybe you identified with one or more of these characters.

Which?

Why?

What are you going to do next?