

# Reflection on the Second Sunday after Easter

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## Read: Acts 3:1-21

<https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=acts+3%3A1-21&version=NRSV>

Last week we had a Bible reading from Acts chapter 1 in which the disciples were encouraged by the risen Jesus to stay where they were, so they were making the most of the time with plenty of prayer, in a posture of anticipation that God was preparing to do something in and through them. That has a number of resonances with our situation, as we spend time staying where we are, in a posture of anticipation and readiness for God at work in and through us. And so last week's reflection concluded with an invitation to prayer.

Today, the Narrative Lectionary that we're following gives us a reading about both prayer and action. In fact, the Narrative Lectionary suggested that we read only the part about the disciples healing the lame man, but it's worth hearing what follows to get the whole context in which that man was healed.

Peter, the fisherman turned orator, firmly connects the man's healing to Jesus as the long-promised Messiah of God. Last week we heard the risen Jesus teaching his disciples about the kingdom of God, just as Jesus had been teaching from the very beginning; and here, in today's reading, Peter's speech moves to the biggest picture: the fulfilment of the prayer for God's Kingdom in its fullness, the coming "time of universal restoration that God announced long ago through the holy prophets." Everything that the disciples do is looking towards - not a disembodied, distant heaven - but the inbreaking of God's realm among us and in the world. "God's kingdom come", with justice, peace and compassion for even the least of God's people, God's creatures.

Our spirituality and faith sits within the bigger picture of God's love and redemption for the world. It's not just about our own personal comfort, or even our own personal growth. We are called and invited to grow in Christ's likeness *for the sake of the world*.

Today's reading gives a classic example of the big picture – the hope for the whole world – being given expression in a particular action, for a particular person. Presumably by the action of the Holy Spirit, the disciples notice, and then give attention to the man who regularly begs for alms at the temple gate; and they offer him what they can. There are two things to notice.

Firstly, this was not a inside the temple. At best it was at the gate, with a man who was not necessarily a temple-goer himself. But God brought this person to the disciples' attention. So often, changing the world, or a part of it, starts with the person in front of you, when God calls your attention, when you're listening. Which leads to the second observation.

The disciples were listening, because they were in the business of praying - listening for God not just for their own sake but for the sake of the world for which they knew God's heart. Did you notice when this event occurred? It was as the disciples were going to the temple *at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon.*

I wonder how many of us think of 3 o'clock as a time for prayer? And I think it's interesting to notice that Jesus' first disciples, at least while they were in Jerusalem, had regular times for going for prayer. Presumably when they were away from Jerusalem they had different patterns – patterns and routines don't always have to stay the same. But this makes me wonder about an experiment.

Some of you might have a well-established routine for something like a daily quiet-time: a time for reading a passage from the Bible, reflecting, and praying; and I know that among us there are some who are wonderful at holding people before God in prayer. But sometimes some of us get bored with our routines, and sometimes we might find prayer boring, and we need to experiment with different forms as circumstances and needs change. For the last few years I've valued podcast-led prayer time while I've been in the car, but I'm not driving so much at the moment. For many of us, this is a different context, so I want to play with this 3pm prayer idea.

I'm not about to suggest that we should all pray at 3pm because that will make us "good Christians". I'm not interested in making anyone into a "good Christian"; nor do I want to make any assumptions about the current shape of anyone's day. But what I **am** interested in is helping us all to maintain and develop our postures of listening for God, so that we are prepared and ready for those moments when God draws our attention to the person sitting at the gate, or to whatever else God wants us to learn, to do or to release.

And I offer the following idea partly because we don't very often talk about "how we grow our relationship with God" on days apart from Sundays, and maybe this is a good time to experiment with some new patterns.

What if, six days a week (not seven, in case we start to think that it's all about our own efforts), as many of us that could stopped at 3pm to pray, for 5 or 10 minutes. And my suggestion would be to light a candle as part of that time, to help set it aside as special.

And if you want to develop it further, you could try having 3 times in a day to stop for 5 or 10 minutes, 6 hours apart: My suggestion would then be this:

- \* Before 9 AM, spend 5 or 10 minutes *reading* something – the Bible, or a commentary on the Bible, listening for what you might learn, for what God might draw to your attention.
- \* Around 3 PM, spend 5 or 10 minutes praying, perhaps with a candle lit, perhaps *writing* prayers for the world, yourself, your observations.
- \* Around 9 PM spend 5 or 10 minutes *reflecting* on the day, reviewing where you felt God close, or not so close, and leaning into God's grace.

Maybe you do these things already, but if we don't talk about it, who would know?

IF that's something like a pattern that you think maybe God might be calling you to experiment with, then let me know – or let someone else know, and make an experiment of it for the next few weeks. If a few people want to do something like that and compare what they notice after a week or two, that would be great.

A pattern of

Reading before 9am,

Prayer (maybe written) at around 3pm,

Reviewing what you've noticed in the day around 9pm –

that's a simple version of the kind of pattern that Christians have used for centuries – all so that God may grow us in Christ to be ready to notice where God draws our attention – like to the man at the gate – for the sake of God's kingdom breaking in to all the world.

In the name of Christ.