

Meeting God on Sunday

Peter Horne for Lawson Rd Church of Christ – 19 July, 2009

It's good to be back home at Lawson Rd today after a couple of weeks break. The first week Julie and I were away we attended the Lipscomb Summer Celebration or Lectureship. The Summer Celebration is basically a two day conference with lots of interesting speakers and lots of singing as well. Julie had attended this event but as a child with her family, and I'd never been before, so neither of us knew exactly what to expect.

We had some expectations that we'd be at an event with hundreds of other Christians. We expected there to be some well-known speakers who would deliver encouraging messages. We thought there'd be some classes that would give us new ideas. We hoped that we would come back refreshed and energized as God reminded us of our calling to ministry, of our calling to follow Him. But we didn't really know anyone else that was going. We hadn't done much homework to find out who the speakers were, or even what the theme of the weekend was. We had very little insight into how God would use this event in our lives.

So I got to thinking about how our situation was similar to the story we find at the start of Acts 3. It's an ordinary day. (Probably not a Saturday or Sunday or Luke would have told us that.) It's just an ordinary day of the week. Yet it's at a point in history when nothing's completely ordinary.

Not that long before God, in the person of Jesus, had been killed: nailed to a cross. That's anything but ordinary. In fact, that's the pivot of history. We know that Jesus didn't stay buried. After 40 days wandering around Jerusalem in his resurrection body, Acts 1 tells us how he returned to heaven. Acts 2 then tells of a completely new presence of God among His people. The Holy Spirit came upon the church and they poured out into the streets sharing the Good News of Jesus with everyone they saw. They witnessed so powerfully that about 3000 joined them in committing their lives to follow Jesus and his teachings.

Acts 2:46 tells us that this new church met every day in the temple courts. In fact, the Jews regularly attended the temple 3 times a day for prayer, at 9am, noon, and 3pm and the early Christians continued this tradition. Now even given the excitement of the times for these first Christians, don't you think 3 times a day would get old pretty quickly? Wouldn't it be easy for this time to become routine? I know some of us have trouble rolling out of bed once a week to get to church, what would 3 times a day be like?!?!?!?

But it wasn't only worshipers coming regularly to the temple. In v2 we meet a man without a name. A man so ordinary his name isn't recorded. He was lame, and had been since birth. Every day some friends or family brought him to the temple, not to worship, but to beg for coins. He begged for his livelihood. We have no indication that he knew of Jesus or the Holy Spirit. He was an ordinary Jewish

beggar, at his usual place, on an ordinary day. He had no expectation that today would be any different to any other day except the hope that he might take home a few more, or a few less, coins than usual.

I wonder how many of us approach worship with an attitude similar to this man. We turn up each week and sit in the same place, expecting the same thing, except that today the service may be a little shorter, or a little longer. We sing about God, we talk to God, we listen to a sermon about God, and then we return home “until the next appointed hour” next Sunday morning. Our expectations for Sunday morning can be pretty low sometimes.

But this day was about to become the most wonderful day in the beggar's life. Today he encounters the power of God and his life will never be the same. I wonder how you picture this beggar at the temple gates. There were lots of gates in the temple, but he sits at a particular gate named “Beautiful”. I picture this as a strange contrast, a beautiful gate and a lame man that people probably avoided. Did he smell? Was he an aggressive beggar? Did he reach out and grab people, trying to get their attention as they scurried past?

This day the beggar encountered some men with the Spirit of God. **READ 3:3-8** Peter and John were perhaps coming to the temple for the 3rd time today. Wearing a rut in the cobblestones. Still, they recognize an opportunity to share God's power with someone in need. They bring good news, healing, and freedom. They do this not by their strength, but in the Name of Jesus Christ.

We may not be able to grab someone by the hand and cure all their illnesses, but I believe Peter and John set an example for us. They came to worship looking for opportunities to share God's Good News with others. Because they're looking they find someone hurting and they bring him joy.

I wonder how our worship experience would be different if we came each Sunday expecting to meet God. I wonder how worship would change if we came expecting God to use us each time to talk to a guest, comfort someone who's hurting, encourage someone who's struggling. I wonder how worship would be different at Lawson Rd if we came seeking God to speak to us each week: wondering if my life will be different from this day on because of God's Word to me today. I wonder if we come expecting to meet God. And surely if we meet God we can't walk away untouched by the encounter.

Or do we perhaps come to worship out of routine, sitting through another sermon, mind already made up that wild horses couldn't drag a confession or request for help out of me today. Determined to sit in the same place, say the same things to same people and get back to life as soon as we can? Do we come to hear God speak to us or do we come to make sure that everything that takes place is done correctly? Do we approach God's Word hoping to gain new insight into God and following Him, or do we come expecting to already know the text and not wanting to change our lives anyway? And I wonder if in the process we might not be quenching the Spirit of God in our lives and in our church.

Don't hear me wrong now, sometimes the Spirit of God will grab us by the hand when we're least expecting it, as He did the beggar in Acts 3, and we'll end up jumping around and praising God. But the beggar came to the temple for years before he met God. Rather, as children of God, our Father wants us eagerly looking forward to meeting Him each week. Coming into His presence with a sense of

wonder at what this encounter with God will be like. Excited to see who God brings our way so that we can share God's love and joy with them. So that we can be encouraged by the way God's Spirit is working in the lives of others.

Perhaps the expectations we bring to worship determine what we get out of this time with God. Will you try this? On your way home today ask you husband or wife, your children, the people you have lunch with, "Where did you see or hear God today?" And then next Sunday on your way to worship ask the person you travel with, "I wonder how God will work in our lives today?"

I wonder which of these people in Acts 3 bests reflects your attitude to Sunday morning: the beggar, or the apostles. I hope we're all looking for ways that God can use us to bless others so that when they leave our presence they're jumping around and praising God because we have an amazing God and wonderful message of Good News.

If you've been shutting God out of your life now is the time to open your heart to Him. If you've closed your heart to His Word make the decision to change, commit to giving God's will priority over your will. If you need God's joy in your life today we encourage you to come to the front as we sing this next song. We'll pray with you, study with you, help you. We'll do whatever we can to bring you closer to God's heart.

God is all about bringing people from outside the gate, into His family. Will you come today?