

Hello, followers of Jesus! It is good to be with you again in this virtual space as we walk with the apostles through the book of Acts, this so-called “ordinary time”, that the Holy Spirit makes anything but ordinary. This is pastor Renée Antrosio, praying that the Holy Spirit will open our eyes to the opportunities in front of us, that we could easily pass by without noticing, where God wants to work through us to share what we have been given as a blessing and a balm for those we encounter.

In the third chapter of Acts, the community of Jewish believers in the Way of Jesus has been growing.

**“Every day,” writes the author of Luke and Acts, “they met together in the Temple and ate in their homes. With joyful and sincere hearts, they took their meals in common. They praised God and demonstrated God’s goodness to everyone.”
Acts 2:46-47a**

Today’s text begins with Peter and John going to the Temple for the established prayer time. That’s when observant Jews gathered in the Temple to pray, at about 3 in the afternoon, which made it a good time for the man who was crippled to ask for charity as people were going in. Giving to the poor, to the disabled, is a mitzvah, a good deed, a way to store up treasure in heaven. The man’s family and friends would carry him in every day so that he could ask for money to support himself. Every day people came to pray. Every day people gave alms to this man who had been born crippled, never walked. It was an ordinary day for him. An ordinary time of prayer and almsgiving. 3:00.

What does your ordinary day look like? Does it include time for prayer? I was talking this week with a neighbor who teaches at Jefferson Middle School about the difference in the rhythms of summertime and the academic year and how we need practices to nourish ourselves each day in order to be replenished inwardly to do our work. The practices of the early church cultivated the presence of the Spirit in their community.

They devoted themselves to the apostles’ instructions and the communal life, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. Acts 2:42 (The Inclusive Bible)

What teaching informs your daily life? In my fifties, I have been discovering how poetry provides inspiration for my ordinary mornings. Mary Oliver, David Whyte and more speak insights that go hand in hand with Torah passages, Psalms, and New Testament readings. Just as the early believers needed spiritual input from the apostle’s teaching, we too need instructions from good teachers to help us see the world in new ways.

Tuesday night, many of us had the privilege of attending Vic Fein's poetry reading, and it was wonderful to hear insights from his journey that spoke into our own lives. It was a beautiful representation of the communal life that the author of Luke-Acts describes. As Ron invited us in his teaching last week- how are we entering into the communal life of fellowship instead of isolation, of sharing our lives and our meals in common? These ingredients for a healthy life of faith- teaching/instruction, sharing communal life and meals, and daily prayers- prompt us to look at our own lives, both individually and collectively. Is there one of those that you or we, as a community, are lacking? Do you need to seek out more instruction, more community, more shared meals, more individual or group prayer? What might you be missing? What does our fellowship need more of? I encourage you- I encourage us- to take time to listen for God's Spirit speaking to you, for your individual life and/or for a word for our fellowship. **[Pause for silence, listening, and reflection.]**

This is the context in which Peter and John were walking into the Temple to pray. An ordinary day. And yet God's power was present to break into that ordinary time when Peter and John were willing to see their world, their everyday, in a different way.

Seeing Peter and John on their way in, the person being carried begged them for alms. Peter fixed his gaze on the individual, as did John. "Look at us!" Peter said. The person looked at them intently, hoping to get something. Then Peter said, "I have neither silver nor gold, but what I have I give you! In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" Peter pulled the person up by the right hand. Immediately the beggar's ankles and feet became strong; 8 the individual jumped up, stood for a moment, began to walk around, then went into the Temple with them—walking, jumping about, and praising God. Acts 3:3-8 (The Inclusive Bible)

Peter did not have money to give. Other people did, and that was important. People have to eat. They need homes for shelter and sharing their meals. Peter and John weren't making a living by fishing any more. They were called away from those jobs to take on the ministry of teaching and testifying to what they had experienced. Someone else had to support them and their families. The community of believers was growing as Peter preached, which means the needs were also growing, as were the number of folks who had jobs for income and resources to share. Remember, from Acts 2 last week

All the believers were united and shared everything. They would sell pieces of property and possessions and distribute the proceeds to everyone who needed them. Acts 2:44-45 (CEB)

Like in the early church, we too have resources to share. As an extension of our community, a group of young people who got involved with the Habitat Club at Urbana High School are again down in Mississippi- this week- building houses. They are sharing what they have- young, strong bodies who can do the labor and take the time out of their summer work to participate in providing houses for those who need them. Many of you contributed individually to their trip and as a fellowship we sent \$1000 to that Habitat chapter to provide building materials for their work. There were many years that New Covenant had the youthful people-power to give of our labor and time. In this season, we give of what we do have- money to finance the work they are doing.

That same spirit of unity inspires our Reparations Pilot Project where we invest money that we have- that you have shared- in college savings accounts for African-American grandchildren of our congregation. In 2024, the first year of the Pilot Project, we helped establish education investment accounts for 22 children with \$1000 each. This June, we added another \$500 to each of those accounts. In 2025 so far, 5 more grandchildren have been added to the program and had \$1000 deposited in their college savings accounts, and there are 4 more children in the process of establishing savings for their future education. This is part of sharing what we do have- our commitment to love our neighbors as ourselves through investments in education.

As with Peter, these are not alms, this is not charity. Rather, Reparations are an instrument of healing to individuals who have been crippled all their lives by an unjust system. What we have- a belief in God's power through the name of Jesus to heal and repair wrongs- we can share. Like Peter and John, we need to be willing to see- to really look at a situation that people have become accustomed to as ordinary- and be able to see a different way, that healing is possible. That takes a lot of hope that something that has been crippled our whole lives could be changed. Not by our power, but by sharing what we do have- our attention, our willingness to really see someone and their situation, our words, our faith- that God can heal. Continuing in Acts 3:

While the healed man clung to Peter and John, all the people rushed toward them at Solomon's Porch, completely amazed. Seeing this, Peter addressed the people: "You Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why are you staring at us as if we made him walk by our own power or piety? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of our ancestors—has glorified his servant Jesus.... His name itself has made this man strong. That is, because of faith in Jesus' name, God has strengthened this man whom you see and know. The faith that comes through Jesus gave him complete health right before your eyes. Acts 3:11-13, 16 (CEB)

The faith that God can change things comes through Jesus. It is a gift. And it is something we can ask for more of- more ability to see possibility, more strength to hope, more willingness to share what we have.

On Tuesday, I met with Tracy Dace, the founder of [DreAAm, a non-profit organization](#) that has become much more than its original after-school program acronym of [Driven to Reach Excellence and Academic Achievement for Males](#). During the pandemic, DreAAM began including girls and expanded to meet the needs of families with mentorship, job training, summer programs, and other services to support families holistically in their journey toward their own dreams.

In what ways might we be able to partner with DreAAm and share what we have? Perhaps our building might be a place for the program to grow and serve the community. There was a season at New Covenant when all of our classrooms were filled and our building would not have had space for other organizations. Now we are in a different time when our building could be more of a community space, a different way of loving our neighbors right here. Whether it is Tracy Dace and DreAAm, or whether there are other situations or organizations that need what we have, we pray that God will open our eyes to see the opportunities in front of us and that we will have the faith to take the risk to take someone's hand and help them stand up on their own feet.

The miracle that God accomplished through Peter and John helped not just the one person, but impacted everyone watching. The joy of being able to walk and leap and go into the Temple to pray and praise, the amazement of a situation changed, caused people to listen to Peter's message.

Change your hearts and lives! Turn back to God so that your sins may be wiped away. Then the Lord will provide a season of relief from the distress of this age and he will send Jesus, whom he handpicked to be your Messiah. Jesus must remain in heaven until the restoration of all things, about which God spoke long ago through his holy prophets. Acts 3:19-21

Peter's message was one of action and hope. Change. Turn back to God. Be forgiven, our sins wiped away. Peter says that then the Lord will provide a season of relief from the distress of this age. Those words really stood out to me. Many of us are feeling the distress of this age. We need a season of relief. The person that we can turn to is Jesus. He remains in heaven until the restoration of all things, but he has also sent the Holy Spirit to be our teacher, our comforter, and our companion.

As we continue this series in Acts, I hope we can be inspired anew to seek the Holy Spirit and learn from the early church of ways to be faithful in our own time. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob who was at work through Jesus, and through the apostles is the same God today. That God invites us to keep turning our eyes, our hearts, and our lives towards our Creator. The power to heal, the power to share what we have been given, comes through the name of Jesus. The power of the Holy Spirit to transform us individually and collectively. May our eyes be open, may our hearts be willing, and may God work through us to be agents of healing in our world. Amen.