

"The Gift of the Gospel"
Sermon Series: "The Way of the Spirit"

Acts 3:11-26

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Acts 3:11-26 Peter Speaks to the Onlookers

(New International Version)

¹¹While the beggar held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has given this complete healing to him, as you can all see.

¹⁷"Now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Christ^[a] would suffer. ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²²For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from among his people.'^[b]

²⁴"Indeed, all the prophets from Samuel on, as many as have spoken, have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.'^[c] ²⁶When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Footnotes:

- a. [Acts 3:18](#) Or Messiah; also in verse 20
- b. [Acts 3:23](#) Deut. 18:15,18,19
- c. [Acts 3:25](#) Gen. 22:18; 26:4

What a week, an extraordinary week celebrating the rescue of the 33 Chilean miners after 69 days trapped below, one by one these miners



climbed into that narrow steel cage to take a 15 minutes journey through 2000 feet of rock – a journey to freedom. And the families who had waited, waited and waited continued to wait for their safe arrival. In fact, people all over the world waited and prayed for the rescue of these 33 men.





A lot had taken place in those 69 days including the birth on September 14 of a little girl born to one of the miners named Ariel. He and his wife Elizabeth were planning to name her Carolina, but each decided independently to change her name to Esperanza, the Spanish word for hope. And hope prevailed as a rescue team sent the capsule below this past Wednesday. And hope prevailed each time it resurfaced baring yet another miner.



A miner to be greeted by family and friends. The Chilean president, Sebastián Piñera was on hand when the final miner Luis Urzua (picture to right) was lifted out and euphoric rescuers, relatives and friends broke into cheers and tears. The last miner having emerged to breathe fresh air for the first time since the cave-in on August 5th. Good news to celebrate. Thirty-three men rescued and restored to their families after ten weeks underground.



“This is a miracle from God,” said an uncle of one of those trapped miners. For these men who were believed to be dead for the first seventeen days after the collapse. It is a miracle and an extraordinary rescue. A rescue that captured the world’s attention. These images of celebration remind me of our text from last week.



The story of the crippled man begging at the temple gate, the man to who Peter said, “Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth walk. Taking him by the hand the man began strong, he jumped to his feet and began walking and leaping and praising God.” Crowds gathered, amazed by what had taken place. In such a scene of jubilation, Peter stepped in to make a speech to those gathered there. Deflecting glory from himself, he shared with these men of Israel the good news of the Gospel in terms they could understand. Although they had handed Jesus, the holy and righteous one, over to Pilate to be crucified and even though they had asked for Barbassas’ release rather than for the rescue of Jesus, the resurrection of Jesus Christ proved that He was indeed the Messiah, the One of whom the prophets spoke. “It is the risen Christ who has healed the layman,” urged Peter. Peter said, “Repent, turn to God and receive God’s blessing.” The Gift of the Gospel.

This morning I invite us to focus on verses 19-21.

Consider the magnitude of the Gospel of Peter as proclaiming. A Gospel that is good news, not just for those unbelieving Jews back at the temple, but for you and for me gathered here on a Sunday morning. Good news that causes even the celebration surrounding the miners’ rescue to pale in comparison.

But first let us pray.



Loving God, we come thankful for the gift of life, for the gift of this day, for the gift of the worshipping community and the chance to hear Your Word, to pray, to praise and to allow your Holy Spirit to move in our midst. So we say, come Holy Spirit teach us this morning. Open our hearts and minds again to the wonder of the Gospel. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Let me read again verses 19-21, but this time from the NIV:

¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Christ, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹He must remain in heaven until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets.

The Gospel that Peter proclaimed offers not just one gift, but three. The gift of forgiveness, the gift of refreshment and the gift of restoration.

The First Gift is the Gift of Forgiveness

Remember to whom Peter is speaking, these are Jews familiar with the Holy Scriptures and devout enough to show up at the Temple for mid-afternoon prayer; however, they are men of Israel who failed to recognize Jesus as their Messiah. These are Jews who followed the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob; but who preferred to ask for a murderer's release rather than to save Jesus from the cross. They may have been among those who shouted, "Hosanna, Hosanna" on a Palm Sunday and then Crucify him five days later.

Peter accuses these men of murder, of being complicit in killing the very author of life itself. To these men, Peter offers the gift of forgiveness. He urges them, "Repent, change your mind. Turn back to God so that God can wipe away your sins." Divine amnesty, a free pardon for those who took part in Jesus death; however, to be forgiven they needed to acknowledge their role, to confess their sins and turn to the living God.

Peter & Lorie Barnes are in South Africa this week attending the **Lausanne** Congress on Global Evangelization being held in Cape Town. It is hard to believe that it was just sixteen years ago that apartheid, that system of legal, racial segregation was dismantled and Nelson Mandela elected President. I'm reminded of the truth and reconciliation commission based in Cape Town that was created to bear witness, record and in some cases grant amnesty to those who had violated fundamental human rights, committing gross crimes against humanity.

The establishment of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was a ground breaking international event. Never before had a country sought to move forward from tyranny to democracy, both by exposing the crimes committed in the past and achieving reconciliation with its former oppressors. The



commission provided avenues for the victims of apartheid to voice their pain and their suffering. At the same time it allowed for the perpetrators to ask for forgiveness and make amends. Archbishop Desmond Tutu, the chairman of the commission, wrote a book about the TRC called *No Future Without Forgiveness*. Tutu appealed for tolerance and reconciliation with words like these, he said: “Having looked the beast of the past in the eye, having asked and received forgiveness and having made amends, let us shut the door on the past; not in order to forget it, but in order not to allow it to imprison us. Let us move into the glorious future of a new kind of society where people count, not because of biological irrelevancies or other extraneous attributes, but because they are persons of infinite worth created in the image of God.”

The Gift of the Gospel is the gift of forgiveness. An invitation for the confession of sin and the receipt of God’s forgiveness, a blotting away of our wrongdoing. The God we have gathered to worship this morning is merciful, He does not treat us as our sins deserve. Instead, this God wants to bring us into the light, into freedom. And, even as Peter appealed to the men of Israel, urging them to repent and turn to God this same God continues to appeal to us. Let us take responsibility for the ways in which we have failed to love Him and to love our neighbor. The ways in which we have chosen self over others. The ways in which we have denied Jesus as Lord of our lives. Let us recognize that more often than not, our ways are not God’s ways. And, in humility and faith let us make our confession and seek the cleansing, the forgiveness and the freedom God wants to offer us.

But, you know confession is something we don’t do very well. There are so many people including Christians who “carry around a pile of guilt...because they refuse to name sin, sin”^[1]. We can’t forgive ourselves because either we choose to wallow in despair, feeling that we are far too unworthy to be forgiven. Or, we excuse ourselves too easily or we make up our own penance trying to earn our own forgiveness. Instead, God invites us to come as we are before the throne of grace and acknowledge our sin before Him. If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just. He will forgive our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.

The Gift of the Gospel is the gift of forgiveness. It is a gift meant not just for our benefit, but also a gift we are to extend to others. “Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors.” The way of the Spirit is the way of forgiveness and you and I are called to be like Jesus, kind and compassionate, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God has forgiven us.

I wonder, this morning, if you need to receive once again the gift of God’s forgiveness. Are there areas in your life / behaviors perhaps no one knows about, that you need to own up to before God? Something you’ve done or left undone that continues to haunt you and which you need to bring into the light of God’s presence. Or, perhaps there is someone to whom you need to extend forgiveness. God wants to remind us this morning, in the words of N. T. Wright, “that His gentle love longs to set us free from the prison we have stumbled into – that loveless prison where we refuse both the offer and the demand of forgiveness.” He invites us to expose the darkness to the light and allow His love to bring healing and wholeness into our lives – setting us free to be the people He created us to be. And when we come out of the darkness into the light He calls us to offer the same gentle gift of forgiveness to those around us.



Let us pause for a moment and allow the Holy Spirit to reveal those places in our lives we need to confess.

Forgiveness is the Gift of the Gospel. Forgiveness is the way of the Spirit.

The Second Gift is the Gift of Refreshment

Peter invites the crowd to repent so that their sins may be wiped out. Then he speaks of a second gift – that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord. The Greek term here for refreshment does not occur anywhere else in the New Testament. But other ancient sources point to the idea of “cooling by blowing” – that idea of relief. The same word occurs first in an early Hippocratic tractate where it denotes the drying out and healing of an open wound which the surgeon has left exposed to the air. God wants to bring the healing and refreshment to His people. Just as Isaiah prophesied using imagery of pouring water on a thirsty land and streams on dry ground, God promises to pour His Spirit on Israel’s offspring and blessing on Israel’s descendants.

Jesus too offered refreshment. He offered “living water” to that woman at the well promising that such water would become a spring of water welling up to eternal life. And Jesus offers refreshment to everyone saying, “If anyone is thirsty let him come to me and drink. Whoever believes in me as the Scripture has said, streams of living water will flow from within him or her.”

A cool breeze, the healing of a wound, living water. The second gift of the Gospel is that of refreshment in the presence of the Lord.

Yesterday we held our biannual Stephen Ministers retreat – an opportunity for those who were able to get away to spend the morning seeking refreshment in the presence of God. We gathered in the home of one of our members, spent some time as a group in lectio divina – hearing the Word of God, but most of our time was spent in silence – meditating on God’s Word and listening for God’s word to us. It was a beautiful day and for me it was a taste of paradise – a time of refreshment.

I’m always surprised by how valuable even four hours can be set aside to enjoy God’s presence. And even though I know such time is well spent, it is still a challenge to put those times in my schedule. The gift of refreshment, time spent in His presence is a gift he wants to offer to each of us.

Retreat days offer us the grace to be ourselves in God’s presence without self consciousness, without masks, a chance to be both physically and spiritually refreshed. It gives us time to sit and to bask in His love and to empty ourselves of the cares and anxieties that too often dominate our daily life. Retreat provides opportunities to remember, to receive and to be refreshed by his Spirit.

Peter doesn’t end there. Refreshment is the second gift of the Gospel, but he goes on to speak of yet another gift. He goes on to speak of the future – of that time when Jesus will come again to restore everything. The gifts of forgiveness and reconciliation and our time of refreshment we experience are in fact just a foretaste of what’s to come.



The Second Gift is the Gift of the Gospel, is the gift of the restoration of all things!

This morning we recited the Apostle's Creed and every month when we celebrate the Lord's Supper we confess that we believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. We affirm our conviction that one day Christ will come again to establish His Kingdom on earth.

This word for restoration in the Greek means to set in order again. In extra Biblical sources it is used to describe the repair of a public roadway or the restoration of an estate to its rightful owner or sometimes to the balancing of accounts – helpful images when we think of Christ returning to set everything right. Justice and peace will be restored, and our tears will be transformed into joy. There will be a new heaven and a new earth and the dwelling of God will be with His people and He will live with them forever.

My friends, God's purpose is the rescue and restoration of the whole world, the entire cosmos. Remember Jesus' words from Isaiah when He spoke at the synagogue, when He read, "The Spirit of the Lord is on me because He has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom to the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed and proclaim the year of the Lord's favor." And then Jesus went on to say, "Today this Scripture is fulfilled in your hearing." The Kingdom of God is at hand – and there is good news. Good news for the poor and the oppressed and the blind. Good news for all people. Each time you and I pray "they kingdom come they will be done on earth as it is in heaven" we are praying for that restoration.

Jesus came proclaiming that the Kingdom of God is near. His resurrection and the hope that it gives is more than simply anticipating that one day we will leave this earth and go to heaven. Rather it witnesses to the fact that God's kingdom, His presence and His power are already breaking into our world here and now. God's whole new creation has already begun and you and I are its first fruits.

God's larger story must be understood in light of the Kingdom coming. Not simply in the sense that we are the recipients of God's plan of salvation, but also in the sense that part of the point of you and I being saved is that we can play a role in that restoration. Incredibly, God invites us to join Him in His kingdom – coming to share the good news with others, joyfully living out that good news in word and in deed. As the body of Christ living under God's rule and reign we are to be a sign and foretaste of that Kingdom – inviting people to taste and to see that the Lord is good.

God is committed to setting this right so that one day there will be no more children with too little to eat and not place to sleep. One day there will be no more refugees, no more unemployment, no more prisons, no more hospitals, no more men or women addicted to drugs or drink. One day the desert will bloom again and the earth will be restored to her former grandeur. One day there will be peace.

Imagine the joy of each miner as they surfaced to see the son again after 69 days imprisoned underground. Imagine their delight in being restored to family and friends and having the opportunity to begin life again. These gifts as wonderful as they are pale in comparison to the gifts of the Gospel.



The Gospel is a gift that keeps on giving. A gift that is received not just once, but again and again and again. A gift that is meant not just for the Jews and not just for Christians for all people...through Abraham's offspring all peoples on earth are to be blessed. God is inviting us this morning to hear again the Good News. God is inviting us to repent and to reconsider the treadmill we've been on, to get out of our rut and turn again to the living God. He has gifts – amazing gifts – He wants to give us – the gift of forgiveness and reconciliation, not just for ourselves, but for others, too. Gifts of refreshment – real refreshment, deep and satisfying refreshment in His presence..bringing joy and peace and freedom from anxiety. And finally, the gift of restoration – a reminder of His commitment to make all things right and His invitation to join Him in doing just that.

This is the way of the Spirit – to forgive and be forgiven, to refresh even as we ourselves are refreshed and to live in light of the Kingdom of God – a kingdom that is already at hand.

What will you do with these gifts God offers?

Let us pray.

Lord you are the master gift giver. Our pitiful acts of worship and our acts of giving are so paltry in light of the magnitude of the gifts that you have poured out on us. Lord we pray that you would deepen our understanding of what forgiveness and reconciliation looks like in your Kingdom. We pray that you would help us to seek after you, seeking those times of refreshment in your presence and that we would make space for you in our lives. We pray too Lord for the restoration that you envision for your creation. Help us to be a part of what you are doing to make the world what you want it to be. We thank you Lord for Your Word. We thank you for Your Spirit. We thank you for the gift of community and we pray Lord that you would be glorified in our lives. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Photos from CNN.com

^[1] Marva Dawn and Eugene Peterson, *The Unnecessary Pastor* (Vancouver: Regent College Publishing, 2000), 152.

