

"THE MIGHTY POWER OF GOD"

September 16, 1990

TEXT: Acts 3:7 "Now to him who by the power at work within us is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations, for ever and ever. Amen."

One of the problems we always face when we try to speak of God is that finite words can never do justice to an infinite Reality. There may be much we would like to say, but words always seem to fail us.

Even St. Paul --as eloquent as he was-- seems to have had the same problem. In Ephesians, chapter three, verse twenty, we find him speaking of God as "Him who . . . is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think" That almost sounds like one little boy bragging to another, "My father is better than your father." Yet how else can one put into words the enormous gap between our puny desires and God's infinite bounty?

The whole history of God's relationship toward man is one continuous expression of that difference. Could Abraham ever have thought of asking to be the father of many nations, the founder of God's chosen people? Or could those Israelite slaves sweltering down in Egypt --even in their wildest dreams-- ever have asked to escape by passing dry shod through the Red Sea? Could a sinful and confused mankind ever have prayed that God would send His own Son to save us from our aimlessness and sin? Our God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think"

And here in this morning's scripture, we have another case in point. A poor cripple sits begging at the gate of the temple. The Bible tells us he had been lame since birth. As a boy, while friends frolicked with the energy and abandon of youth, he was bound to his pallet like a caged bird or a chained animal.

In manhood, while others earned their living with honest, rewarding toil, he was reduced to begging, eking out an uncertain living from the precarious generosity of others. Each day, friends carried him to the gate called Beautiful in the hope that passers-by might take pity and throw him a few small coins.

One day he saw Peter and John on their way to worship. Perhaps he saw in their faces a kindness and love which gave him hope. Or maybe he just repeated the same sing-song request he made to everyone who came that way. At any rate, as they

approached he asked for alms, hoping --at best-- to receive only a coin or two.

What a wonderful gift God had for him instead. First, Peter demanded his undivided attention. Then he said, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." And --for the first time in his life-- he stood, he walked, he leaped for joy. Yet just a few moments earlier, he would gladly have settled for a piece of copper. Our God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think"

What is really surprising to me, however, is that Peter seems to have shared that beggar's short-sighted attitude. He did not say, for instance, "I will give you something much better than money." But, almost as if embarrassed, he replied, "I have no silver and gold, but I give you what I have"

Now that might not be very important if it were an isolated incident, but it is not. Whatever else you make of this poignant little scene, see in it a parable for us today. We may sing the mighty power of God --as we did a few minutes ago-- but, like that beggar, too often we, too, limit what God is willing to do for us.

Helmut Thielicke wrote: "I believe that the church of Jesus Christ has not yet really grasped just what has been entrusted to us and the wealth that has been given to us We keep thinking of all the things we can no longer do as Christians instead of enjoying the riches of creation and accepting with open hands what God wants to give us."

God offers us joy and peace, but we can not seem to think about anything except that new car. God offers us a vital transforming spiritual reality, and we settle for conventional prayers. God offers us a part in the saving of the world, and all we can think about is new drapes for the parlor. So, because of little expectations, we deny ourselves what God so generously bestows. His bounty is all around us, but we seem neither to notice nor appreciate it. It is as though we believe in God, but just do not expect Him to do anything.

By contrast, the people of the Bible saw God's blessings everywhere. The Psalmist sang, "Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the Pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good as long as you live so that your youth is renewed like the eagle's. (Psalm 103:3-5) And Jesus saw His Father's goodness reflected in such common things as the birds of the air and the flowers of the field.

Is it any wonder that they experienced miracles? They were looking for them. They expected them. When good things happened to them, they said, "This is the Lord's doing; it is marvelous in

our eyes." (Psalms 118:23) We, on the other hand, lay it all to luck or that special refuge of little minds, coincidence. How odd that we should find it easier to believe in nothing at all than in the goodness of a loving God.

In his book What Is Vital in Religion, Harry Emerson Fosdick wrote, ". . . Consider in the first place the intellectual absurdity of believing in God and not expecting marvelous results. To say on Sunday, 'I believe in God the Father Almighty,' and then on Monday not look for extraordinary events to occur, does not make sense, for whatever else God is, he is spiritual power waiting to be released through our lives into the world."

Just what that mighty power of God is waiting to do in your life, or in mine, or in the life of this church I do not know. But I do know this. That power is much more likely to be released in us and through us if we look for it, long for it, pray for it, than if we sit back and smugly smile at the very idea of miracles.

Nearly fifty years ago, in the early days of World War II, Christopher Dawson wrote in the Dublin Review, "The power of man has grown so great that it has denied and shut out the power of the Spirit and consequently is destroying the world." That was true then, and it is even more true today. Our only salvation is to look once more to the source of all that is good and all that is holy, to "Him who . . . is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think"

And we need not know exactly where that power will take us. To quote Dr. Fosdick again, ". . . The Christian faith is meant not simply to be believed in, but experimented with. How few of us Christians do that! Give a scientist a new idea, and he at once thinks of it in terms of experimentation. Let us see what we can do with it! But give Christians the greatest idea that ever dawned upon the mind of man --God, our Father, spiritual reality behind and in our lives, available power for daily use-- and how few of us translate that at once into experimental terms, saying, Come, let us see what this power can do with us and we with it. . . That is what prayer means --taking God in earnest, saying, If God is, let us keep in touch with him and see what he can do in, and for, and through us."

God wants us to be victors, not victims. He wants us to grow, not to grovel. He wants us to soar, not to sink. He wants us to overcome, not to be overwhelmed. But He does not do for us what we prevent Him from doing through us.

How about you? Is your God big enough? Big enough for your life, for your problems, for your needs, for your heart-aches? Or have you let such things discourage you? Our God "is able to do far more abundantly than all that we ask or think"