

Shaken

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Scripture: Psalms 2 and Acts 4: 23 - 31

Walking Rachel to school in the morning, I'm reminded of how random children are. One moment she's racing down the sidewalk, the next moment she's swinging a large branch she found on the ground, and the next moment she is tossing a snail from the sidewalk into someone's yard. How dull my walking is in comparison. I may notice the pretty flowers and stop to seek out a bird or two, but mostly I walk in a straight line between the place of departure and the destination. I'm not prone to sudden spinning around anymore.

After many years of living in the Resurrection, it is not so easy to be spun around by its reality. As the phrase "Jesus lives" recedes into that which we take for granted, or becomes simply a story of our faith, it becomes harder to walk in the freedom of not having to get somewhere. We've forgotten how to walk in the joy of the life poured out for us and how to be open to the possibilities of grace beyond our understanding. Our adult ways are defined. Still, as much as Rachel needs to play, so we adults need to be shaken up by the resurrection--for it leads us to live in a different reality. A world in which we expect during our journey from place to place that we will witness, we will even be employed by, the power of God to heal.

I suspect that Peter and John did not set out one day to heal a lame man who begged for money at the Beautiful Gate. Scripture says they were on their way to pray (Acts 3). But when they saw the man, they looked "intently at him" and asked him to look at them. As they looked into his face, they recognized that God had given them authority in the name of Jesus to heal him. That is exactly what they did. Their deed shook the lame man, who now walked; it shook all who saw the miracle, it shook the religious authorities and it shook the community with whom Peter and John shared their

story.

I'm probably as good as anyone in spiritualizing the miracles of Jesus recorded in the gospels. While I'm not willing to disbelieve that miracles happened, you might have figured out that I often will draw out the symbolism of the miracle rather than simply shout hallelujah that God has healed a person's ailment. The book of Acts doesn't allow room for spiritualizing. Instead, the book of Acts boldly proclaims that for the disciples who live in the Resurrection, miracles, turnabouts, healing, and the showering of grace upon those they meet is part of their service to God.

The book of Acts is a continuation of the history of God's movement in our world that started in Luke's gospel. In Luke's gospel Jesus clearly has in view the fall of Jerusalem and the Temple. From Palm Sunday, you might remember the reading of his weeping over Jerusalem before he enters into the city. Scholars suggest that references like that one point to the gospel being written sometime after 70 CE, the year General Titus of Rome moved into Jerusalem destroying the temple and the abolishing the Jewish High Priesthood. So Luke/Acts forms the narrative of Jesus' work on earth, gives meaning to the Resurrection through the ashes of the fallen temple.

It would be understandable, then, for Acts to be a history of martyrdom. We could excuse an impulse towards the apocalyptic, the idea that God will bring justice to earth in fiery judgment at some future date, where Rome will receive its punishment. There is also a path of personal piety that could have been set out in a way that wouldn't have caused anyone much trouble. In fact scholars rightly argue that Luke is one of the great apologists: wanting to show Rome that Christians are not the ones they need to worry about.

Despite all that would argue for caution, the author of Luke/Acts does not shrink from proclaiming that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ has given Peter, John, and the Christians power from above. He speaks boldly that it is the proclamation of the resurrected Jesus, the very name of Jesus Christ, that unleashes the power of God through the faithful here on earth.

So when Peter and John are released from the custody of those who told them to stop speaking in and teaching in the name of Jesus, they reply "We cannot stop speaking about what we have seen and heard." Then they return to their community.

Their return to their community is significant. Peter and John might have thought to take their act on the road. Healing power can bring in a denarius or two. Instead, they return to the community, and they share what has happened. They were on their way to pray and...well this man asked for alms and when they looked at him, it seemed like Jesus wanted to heal him through them, so they did...and then when people saw he had been healed they were interested in what gave Peter and John power and so they explained...and then the religious authorities got word and told them to stop speaking in the name of Jesus. This was definitely not the straight line they had set out to walk when they woke up that day.

In answer to their report, the community knew exactly what to do. This was not a time to plan against the religious authorities. Nor was it a time to try to set out a new straight line for them to walk. It was a time to allow God to spin them around, a time to pray.

The people of the resurrection pray: "Grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus."

The audacious plea is made only after a set of affirmations. They call on the Sovereign Lord, who made the heaven and the earth, the sea, and everything in them...the God who is in charge of all. They remember David and his words spoken in Psalm 2 which talk about how the kings of the earth plot against the anointed one. Oh, how those

in heaven laugh at their vain plans. And then they remember how God responds through the power of the one he anoints--the one he sends. They recognize in their prayer that Jesus has succeeded David as the anointed one. The kings are Herod and Pilate and those of Israel who sent Jesus to the cross. They accept that this was part of God's predestined plan for the world. Only then, only after they have given voice to their belief, do they ask to be given the boldness to continue to speak God's word.

If we, a Christian church, want to make a difference in the world, our community prayer begins in trusting that God overcame all that was set against his anointed...and will overcome all that is set against us who are his heirs.

It is beautiful that so many of you have taken Prayer 101 and have developed a personal prayer life. Note, though, that the book of Acts extends the vision of prayer beyond one person speaking to God. Acts portrays the disciples praying with one another. It is community prayer that shakes the building. If our church is to be a healing presence, we need to spend time praying together. I speak this as one who loves to plan and finds it hard to be still long enough to pray. But God continues to call me to stop living life as if it were all about going from point A to point B along the straight line of my own reason.

The more we pray together, the more we affirm our belief that God wants to heal those in our community and heal divisions in our world. As we are willing to ask for Christ's healing, so we will shake up this beachside community. This community of people who are running so fast they don't have time to see the scars they've left behind, in others and in their own hearts, in their race to feel well, in their race to make the world whole on their own power.

The more we pray, the more we will see the power of God. The more we live into the resurrection, the more we will believe Jesus can, even now, make people-- make our world--well.

At Loma Linda Hospital there is a picture in the lobby that greets you. It is of a doctor performing surgery with Jesus by his side. There is

truth in that image. All the medical arts have their place and the natural paths to healing have their place. Jesus, too, has his place--and it isn't just in worship. The gospels agree Jesus spent a lot of time outside of the temple.

Through praying with others in a way that trusts Jesus to come and heal, I believe unequivocally that Jesus makes people well. Experiences of the last year have shaken me out of the path that would lead me to an mundane ministry of program development. I confess that I have too often bought into the idea that our faith is just another path among many, as good as the other. That what we do is based in our own ability, our own plans. That Jesus is just a model for living this life, a model of living I'll never reach.

No. Jesus is the author of grace. Jesus can be called upon to help when a community is arguing, when a marriage is in need of help, when we are looking for a way to respond to the needs God has brought to our attention. Jesus will stretch out his hand to heal while signs and wonders are performed in his name. Jesus will give us authority to spill out his grace upon the world... that our world may be made whole.

The video clip of Susan Boyle singing "On My Own" from *Les Miserables* was one of the stories of the week. How skillfully edited is the piece, capturing the crowd's disbelief that Susan was even on the stage. The judges are polite but are not able to hide their skepticism. Then Susan begins to sing, and the judges and the crowd are shaken. Simon smiles, and though he probably had a hand in setting the scene, he is still captivated by the moment. And, as Susan hits the climactic notes the crowd rises to their feet.

Yes, there is power in Susan Boyle, her voice, her presence. But the song she sang, I suspect, was essential in creating the transcendent moment.

In the musical, these words are sung by the tomboy waif left behind as the young man chooses the beautiful ingénue to love. "There are dreams that cannot be..." is a phrase that rings just as true in the voice of a non-glamorous 50 year old. The last words of the song, "now life has killed the dream I dream" resonates a little too well

these days. Yet her very being on stage signifies something has allowed her dream to come alive. And the crowd applauds.

Oh, how people respond to grace. People have known so little.

Lisa Schwarzbaum writes...I'm pondering why the experience of watching and listening to Ms. Boyle makes so many viewers cry, me among them. And I think I've got a simple answer, at least for me: In our pop-minded culture so slavishly obsessed with packaging -- the right face, the right clothes, the right attitudes, the right Facebook posts -- the unpackaged artistic power of the unstyled, un-hip, un-kissed Ms. Boyle let me feel, for the duration of one blazing show stopping ballad, the meaning of human grace. She pierced my defenses. She reordered the measure of beauty. And I had no idea until tears sprang how desperately I need that corrective from time to time.

We are a people hungry for grace, where a woman left behind can be a star. Grace heals. As much as Rachel needs to play on the way to school, people need God's grace to turn expectations over and spin them around.

So we who hold the power of Jesus' name have an awesome task ahead of us. We who hold the power of Jesus' name hold the power of grace in our hands. Through Jesus we can give another the song that lifts them, and those who watch them rise, into a new realm. Through Jesus, in prayer, we are the ones who are given the words to speak that are meant to be written into people's hearts. These are the words that allow them to enter onto a new stage. We are the ones called to heal, called to perform signs and wonders out of the power that comes from faith, the belief that because of the Resurrection Jesus can and will act today.