

Pastor Gregory P. Fryer  
Immanuel Lutheran Church, New York, NY  
4/19/2015, The Third Sunday of Easter  
Acts 3:11-19  
The Author of Life

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

In my sermon this morning, I aim to lift up an encouraging phrase from our First Lesson, from Acts 3. It is an encouraging phrase, but alas, it rests within a sad sentence. This good phrase is one that describes our Lord Jesus: Saint Peter says that Jesus is the “Author of life.” The sad sentence reports on what humanity did to this Author of life:

<sup>14</sup>But you rejected the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer given to you, <sup>15</sup>and you *killed* the Author of life...(Acts 3:14-15, NRSV)

It was a strange and dark affair, that we should have killed the Author of life, but for all that, let’s not forget that happy phrase about “life.” We should cherish the teaching that Jesus is the “Author of life.” The rest of the sentence is true, sorry to say. It is true that all too often, we poor human beings prefer Barabbas to Jesus, we prefer even a murderer and destroyer of life to the very Author of life. And of this we should repent, with great sorrow and earnestness. But the beginning point of repentance and getting our life more on track is to rejoice in the fact that Jesus always sides with life. He is indeed the “Author of life.” When we are dealing with Jesus, we are dealing with the One who says to everyone in sight that he wants life for them. It is his continual concern for us. He is not the *thief* of life, but the *Good Shepherd* of life:

The thief cometh not, but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy: I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly. (John 10:10, KJV)

The King James Bible translates our happy phrase as the “Prince of life.” The idea is the same: If we would follow Jesus, he will lead us onwards toward life. He does not diminish life for us, or impoverish life for us, or deplete life for us, but rather his ministry is to increase our vitality. Jesus wants us to live as we’ve never lived before – not just differently, but better, “more abundantly.”

## The lame man

Certainly that was the case for the lame man in this morning’s First Lesson. Jesus *increased* his life, so that he bounced around with joy. His story is one of my

favorite stories in the Bible. The man had never before walked. Mothers and fathers look on with joy as their little ones take their first steps, but this man never took his first steps, till now. The Bible says that he was lame “from his mother’s womb” (Acts 3:2). For more than forty years (Acts 4:22), the man had been dependent on the kindness of others. Or perhaps he relied not so much on their kindness, but had worked out a more practical arrangement with certain of them, such that he paid them to carry him each day to his begging spot. He had his own location. Other beggars probably left him to it. It was by the “Beautiful gate.” Listen to the Bible’s description of his day-by-day life:

And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple; (Acts 3:2, KJV)

Some days are probably good, some days not. If he pays people to carry him to his begging spot, that pay diminishes his profits for the day. It is a hard way of life, you can well imagine.

Then, one good day, he sees Peter and John walking by. Seeing them, he asks for alms. There is no indication that he knows that they are apostles. There is no indication that he even knew what the word “apostle” means. We do not know whether he had heard tell about Jesus of Nazareth. All we know is that he looked toward Peter and James with hope of getting some money.

Then Peter said to him the sweetest of things. Peter admitted that he could not give him money, but he could give him something better:

<sup>6</sup>Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none; but such as I have give I thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk. (Acts 3:4-6, KJV)

And then the Bible multiplies the verbs of energy and joy:

<sup>8</sup>And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. (Acts 3:8, KJV)

Do you see what I mean? Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. Indeed, he is the Author of life.

This is a great Easter Season story because it illustrates an important theme about Jesus – an important theme but one that should not be taken for granted. What it illustrates is that the trauma of Calvary did not somehow spoil the soul of Jesus. As he healed the lame before Calvary, so he heals them again when he is resurrected. He has not turned from his old ways. He was the Author of life before Good Friday, and he continues the Author of life after Easter to this very day.

# Killed the Author of Life

Now let's take a look at the troubling point St. Peter makes about what happened to the Author of life: We humans killed him. This is a strange and dark reality about us: We can know full well that Jesus and his ways would be good for us, yet we are capable of choosing against him. What did the crowd say when Pilate offered to set Jesus free?

<sup>39</sup>“But you have a custom that I should release one man for you at the Passover; will you have me release for you the King of the Jews?” <sup>40</sup>They cried out again, “*Not this man, but Barabbas!*” (John 18:39-40, RSV)

Till the Kingdom of God comes, this is forever our temptation: to prefer Barabbas to Jesus:

“Not this man, but Barabbas!”

“Not this man, but my drink, though I've already drunk enough!”

“Not this man, but laziness, snoozing when we should be working!”

“Not this man, but greed and ambition, working ourselves to the bone, working ourselves to death!”

“Not *this* man, but *that* deal -- shady, illegal, even criminal though it might be!”

“Not this man, but yon irresistible one, regardless of the damage it does to my family!”

“Not this man, not Jesus, the Author of life, but ten thousand other ways to drip and strip life away from us!”

Barabbas himself must have said a similar thing to have landed in such trouble: “Not this man and his holy ways, but this robbery, this insurrection, this shedding of blood!”

## Barabbas

And this brings me to that man, Barabbas. If ever a man could say, “Christ died for me! Christ died in my stead!” he is the man. One or the other must die,

Barabbas or Jesus. The crowd calls out its preference: “Not this man, but Barabbas. Let the murderer go free, and kill the Author of life.”

Now, imagine that the years roll by and one day Barabbas looks up and sees Jesus walking along the road – maybe walking along the road to Emmaus, as in today’s Gospel story. What is Jesus going to say to him? What is the Author of life going to say to the taker of life? What is the gentle One going to say to the violent one, the sweet One to the foul one, the innocent One to the guilty one? What is Jesus going to say to Barabbas? Why, what he always says to us, as long as we are living:

Come unto me, Barabbas, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn of me, for I am gentle and lowly and you will find rest for your soul. (Rf. Matthew 11:29-30)

The man had fallen a long ways. Who knows? When the crowd had cried out, “Release Barabbas. Crucify Jesus!” maybe Barabbas himself had joined in. Maybe he had shouted too, “Not this man, but Barabbas!” And when he had been released, maybe he skipped away, completely pleased with himself. However that might be, it is still the case that life really becomes its best, for him and for you and me too, when we find Jesus and surrender ourselves to him, the very Author of life.

## **Carry life as far as you can**

Let me close with a few words about those of you who love life and fight on its behalf. It was a sweet day for the man born lame when Peter and John walked by and healed him in the name of Jesus. Many of us would like that. We would love it for someone to pass by, stop before us, and make things better for us.

Yesterday I attended the funeral for a dear lady named Lorna Hannah, the wife of Pastor John Hannah. The funeral was held in a large Catholic church in the Bronx, with many Catholic priests in the chancel, plus Fr. Thomas Green, a lifelong Missouri Synod Lutheran who preaches for us on Good Fridays. An interesting thing about the liturgy was that both the presiding priest and the assisting priest were disabled. They walked slowly and carefully with complicated metal canes, with cuffs into which their arms fit. The presiding priest started off his sermon with the charming note that in Catholic doctrine, the only one who preaches sitting down is the Pope, but that he was going to preach sitting down too, for convenience. I thought to myself, “How splendid it is going to be when these dear priests can do what the man in our story did:

<sup>8</sup>And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God. (Acts 3:8, KJV)

We are ill in so many ways, whether it is our health, our finances, our relationships, or whatever. So many illness, so much need of the Great Physician. We all know that. There is great need for healing in this world.

Many of you are already fighting on the side of life, and you deserve credit for that. Perhaps you are ill, but trying hard to get better, fighting on the side of life. You are going to the doctor, taking your medicine each day, even submitting to surgery if need be. If you are struggling with addictions, you are going to counselors or groups of fellow sufferers. If your finances are a wreck, you are working on a budget, trying to straighten things out. If your relationships are near ruin, you are seeking and granting confession and forgiveness.

Perhaps you are a nurse, or a nursing aid, or a physician, or a social worker, or a teacher, or a policeman or policewoman, and you are discouraged because it too often feels that you are making little progress. It feels like you are the little boy or little girl with your finger in the dike, trying to hold back the sea.

Well, for all of us who love life and fighting on its behalf, I close with two thoughts:

First, there will come a day when the Great Physician, Jesus Christ himself, will come again and complete your work. You are not spitting in the wind. You are rather doing what lies available to you until that day when the Savior comes and completes what you have started. Your labors are not in vain. If they are good and wholesome labors, they will one day reach perfection, because Jesus will see to it. Entrust your labors to him.

And the final thought is simply this: till that day comes when the Great Physician returns to our earth with power and glory, let us push the ball on down the road as far as we can. If we are fighting on the side of life, let us fight on. Let us advance the cause of goodness as far as we can. And if we should fall exhausted someday, and if we should fall short of all we would accomplish, at least let it be said that we tried! We carried the load as far as we could, and now we commend the matter to the One who is trustworthy, even Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom belongs the glory with the Father and the Holy Spirit now and forever. Amen.