

# ***Times Of Refreshing***

Acts 3:11-23

April 22, 2018

First United Methodist Church, Lindstrom

(This is a manuscript prepared for sermon delivery and may not represent actual words spoken.)

*“Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...”*

I like the phrase “times of refreshing”. It seems to be the result of repenting and turning to God. Peter told the people to repent and turn to God. He said their sins would be wiped out if they repented and turned to God. Then times of refreshing would come.

The book of Acts is the second book penned by Luke. Luke began his first book—his Gospel—by telling someone named Theophilus that he was about to write an orderly account of the life of Jesus. He began his second book—this book of Acts—by writing, “In my former book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and to teach until the day he was taken up to heaven, after giving instructions through the Holy Spirit to the apostles he had chosen.”

Indeed, Luke’s Gospel ends with Jesus telling the apostles to stay—to wait—in Jerusalem until they had been clothed with power from on high. They would then be witnesses. Then came the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

The book of Acts begins right where Luke ends. There is a bit of repetition and overlap. Acts begins with Jesus again telling the disciples that they would receive power from on high. They would be witnesses beginning in Jerusalem and then to the ends of the earth. Then Jesus ascends into heaven. In chapter two they receive that power. They start giving witness to Jesus.

So back to that Theophilus thing. Luke said he wrote in his first book about the things Jesus began to do and to teach. We can infer from those words that in this second book Luke will write about what Jesus continued to do and to teach. Only Jesus has physically left the scene.

He has ascended...gone into heaven. This means that what Jesus continued to do and to teach he continued to do through the apostles.

This is true. The third chapter, from which we read, begins with a miracle...a miracle just like what Jesus would have done.

Peter and John were on their way to the temple to pray. It was three in the afternoon. They still observed some of their Jewish customs. There was a man who had been crippled his entire life. He had not experienced the simple joy of walking. He was carried to one of the temple gates. He would sit there and beg from those heading into the temple courts. It was a good place to beg. Folks on their way to the temple would be in more of a mood to be generous. I mean, being as these were folks who were big on obedience to the law and loving their neighbor and all that, they didn’t want to go and do their talking to God after having just ignored a crippled beggar.

Peter and John looked at this guy. They told him to look at them. Beggars—not having much pride in their situation—tended to look down...not wanting to make any sort of eye contact. The man looked at them. He was expecting a gift. He did receive a gift. It was not a gift of money. Peter said he had no money. But he did have Jesus. He looked at this man and said, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.”

Peter helped the man to his feet. The man’s ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet. He was walking and leaping and praising God. I’m sure many of you have sung that chorus, “Leaping and walking and praising God....”

Well...this sure drew a crowd. There were already all those folks heading into the temple.

They gathered around Peter and John and this healed guy. Peter began to speak to them. He opened his remarks with a question. "Men of Israel, why does this surprise you?" This is Peter we are talking about. Peter...who not long before this said he didn't even know who Jesus was. Peter...who asked that crowd of folks why they were so surprised. They didn't heal the crippled beggar. Jesus did.

And then Peter did a little preaching. It was some mighty fine preaching. Peter preached the gospel. He preached the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus. He proclaimed that God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets. Peter got it. Peter—who was not too far removed from having lopped off a soldier's ear and then denying Jesus. Peter invited people to repent and turn to God and be forgiven and have their slate wiped clean and then experience times of refreshing.

Obviously there is a lot going on in this text. I want to zero in on this forgiveness-and-times-of-refreshing thing.

Now you all surely know that I am not a big quote guy. By that I mean I do not too often share quotes...wise, insightful, and funny stuff that people more wise and insightful and funny than I am have uttered. I prefer to just tell you what I think. Maybe that is not too humble of me. Oh well.... But I do have a lot of favorite quotes. Check out my Facebook page and you'll see my favorite all time quote. I do have a favorite quote on the topic of forgiveness. Paul Boese said, "Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future." I like that one. Forgiveness does not change the past, but it does enlarge the future.

Think of the Apostle Peter, the guy doing the talking and preaching in our text. He did deny Jesus. He denied Jesus and then watched Jesus suffer and die. How crummy—downright awful—do you think Peter felt about that? We do know he wept bitterly. I'm just thinking here...but I think Peter just may have felt unworthy of Jesus' love...unworthy of forgiveness.

Do you think that while Jesus appeared those forty days after his resurrection that he and the one who denied him had some private time together...maybe a little one on one conversation? We can't say for sure...but I think so.

Do you think that while Jesus appeared those forty days after his resurrection, and he and Peter talked, that Peter maybe apologized to Jesus. We can't say for sure...but, again, I think so. And how many times do you think Peter said "I'm sorry" to Jesus? Don't know. I know if it had been me, I might have said "I'm sorry" a couple dozen times...just to be sure.

Do you think there came a time when Jesus looked at Peter and said, "I forgive you"? I don't think we need to guess at this. I do believe that time did come. How do you think Peter felt then? A bit refreshed, perhaps.

Now Peter still had denied Jesus. That never changed. It was not undone. We still talk about it these couple thousand years later. Preachers still preach sermons on it. Peter denied Jesus. Jesus forgave him...but that forgiveness did not change the fact that Peter denied Jesus. But boy-oh-boy did that forgiveness ever change and make brighter the future for Peter. Look at him. He's preaching the good news.

A couple of quick points to end here.

One, God does not harbor grudges, and that is a great thing. God does not hold grudges. God forgives us, and that settles the matter. And when we turn to God and are forgiven by God, these times of refreshing come. We are revived. We are made new. To speak in a metaphor, our screen is wiped clean and updated with new information. The new information is we are forgiven. And this changes our entire future. It makes bright our future. It makes eternal our future.

It does not matter what you have done. It does not matter what is in the past. God forgives. That does not mean the past is changed, but it does mean the future is. There is a better and brighter future of following Jesus.

So repent and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord....

Finally, God does not hold grudges, but we sometimes do.

Perhaps there is someone in our lives against whom we hold a grudge. We are angry...bitter...unable to forgive. I would challenge you today to let go of that. It is not easy...not easy at all. No need to pretend it is. Letting go and forgiving will not change the past. It won't. But I wonder what it might do for the future.

A lot more forgiveness. A lot more grace. May not undo the past. But it sure would make for a much brighter and refreshing future...don't you think?

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