

ON THE PORCH

April 15, 2018

Easter 3

[Psalm 4:1,6-8](#)

[Act 3: 1-2,6-7,11-16](#)

(prayer)

The followers of the Risen Christ did *not* view themselves as the pioneers of a new religion. The words *Christian* and *Christianity* wouldn't become part of popular culture for few more decades.

In the weeks that followed the death and resurrection of Jesus, the disciples continued to be nurtured in the scriptures that nurtured Jesus: The Law, Prophets and Writings foundational to all Israelites. When back in Galilee, they would gather with their neighbours for Sabbath worship in the synagogue. And when in Jerusalem, as they were after the Festival of Weeks (that was 50 days after passover), they spent much time in the temple.

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If you have spent time wondering the downtown streets of any North American city, you will have encountered panhandlers.

Although some municipalities try to pass bylaws against this kind of solicitation, have officers dedicated to their enforcement and make public spaces uncomfortable with strategically placed spikes, the reality is that panhandlers are

people (like everyone else) who are trying to meet the needs of each day.

Although it dominates the speeches of the *Not In My Back Yard* crowd, the “they are just lazy or greedy” arguments apply to so few street people that it serves no real value in examining the reality of the human condition.

My experience with panhandlers in many places is that - although *extreme poverty* is the common denominator - there are almost other factors at play: addiction, mental or physical health issues. These factors - often make it difficult for the person to be employed and self-sustaining, meaning that poverty is an effect, rather than a cause of their situation.

When I was in Chicago a couple times last year learning the ins and outs of Intentional Interim Ministry, I noticed that there was a high percentage of people asking for help who were military veterans... some with obvious physical injuries and most (it seems) living with the mental impacts of living in the violence of war zones.

When I am in a city where I expect to be among people who will be panhandling, I try to work into my budget for the day to include some money that I can share with a fellow citizen of this globe.

At a minimum, I try not to avert my glaze and join the majority who think that eye contact only ‘encourages them’.

The truth is... obvious homelessness is overwhelming. I know that the *little bit* that I can do, barely scratches the

surface of the need. I can do little more than smile with most of the people I meet.

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All of this was going through my mind, as I read the passage from Acts today.

We heard that there were people who had no means of meeting the basic needs of daily survival other than relying on the generosity of the temple visitors. This was - in fact - the official social assistance system of ancient Israel.

Deuteronomy 15:11 (part of the section of the Old Testament called the Torah (the Law) says: *Since there will never cease to be some in need on the earth, I therefore command you, 'Open your hand to the poor and needy neighbour in your land.*

Almsgiving was considered an obligation of the faithful worshipper.

People of Jerusalem in need of help would gather at the entrances to the temple.

It must have seemed overwhelming to see the sheer amount of need on display. Like on the streets of 21st century cities, I suspect that in 1st century Jerusalem, more people passed by without a word.

When Peter tells the lame man at the *Beautiful Gate* that he has no money to give, I suspect that the begger thought: *I know, not today; you gave at the office. At least it's better that the shouts to "get a job, ya bum".*

Peter: [*This is*] what I [*do*] have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.

And Peter took him by the right hand and raised him up. The newly healed man walked back through the outer courtyard with Peter and John where they hosted a gathering in Solomon's Porch along the Easter wall of the Temple complex.

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Solomon's Porch (portico, colonnade, cloister) was a part of the 1st century Jerusalem temple.

This was the second Hebrew temple.

The original temple was built in the mid-900s BCE. [King Solomon built an ornate stone temple](#) as an extension of his father David's establishment of Jerusalem as the capital of the united Hebrew kingdom.

From the time of Moses, the people of Israel used a tent tabernacle as a place to house the Ark of the Covenant - the ceremonial box that contained the broken tablets of the original ten commandments. The tabernacle moved with the people as they completed the last half of their exodus journey (Mount Horeb to Land of Canaan). Even after the twelve tribes settled in their new (old) homeland, the tabernacle maintained its nomadic potential.

After David became king, he took possession of the Ark... and after he built Jerusalem - on the outskirts of his home town of Bethlehem - he placed the tabernacle on the highest

hill in the city... where it stayed until Solomon built the temple on the same Mount Zion site.

The porch of Solomon's temple (*ulam* - - in hebrew) served as an entrance to the temple grounds on its eastern side.

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If you know a bit of Old Testament History, you might remember that in the early 6th century BCE, the Babylonian Empire expanded west, engulfing Jerusalem and the lands of Judah, exiling the people back to Babylon and leaving Solomon's temple in ruins.

About 70 years later, the exile ended and a new generation of judeans took on the task of rebuilding the temple on the foundation of the first one.

More than 400 years later, King Herod the Great of Judah took on the monumental task of refurbishing the post-exile temple... the aim of matching the grandeur of Solomon's temple.

It was Herod's temple that Jesus knew.

According to the first century Jewish historian [Josephus](#)... the porch (or "cloisters" as he calls it), east of the Holy House and east of the outer court, along the east wall of temple complex, were indeed built by King Solomon.

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It was this ancient porch (Solomon's Porch) where Peter, John and healed man gathered in today's reading from Acts, chapter three.

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As John and Peter were entering the temple sanctuary through what was called *The Beautiful Gate*, they offered more than the unnamed man requested. Born lame from birth, he had no real opportunity to earn a living... other than by tugging at the heart-strings of worshippers who were willing to be faithful to the Torah and give alms to those in need. Poverty was an effect of the man's physical issues.

This man and others hoped only for their daily bread. But Peter looked past day's need to life's need. Jesus' Rock looked beyond the effect and embraced the cause of the lame man's need.

The healing compassion of Christ flowed through Peter and the man was helped to his feet, when (for the first time in his life) his legs began to bear the weight of his body.

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The text doesn't say it explicitly, but I imagine that Peter and John led their new companion into the sanctuary, where they enjoyed the hour of prayer together.

The man's legs still getting used to their new job, he held on to Peter for support. The text says he *clung to Peter*. All the while, the other worshippers followed the disciples of Jesus with curious eyes.

Peter didn't heal and run. Leaned on Peter, went with Peter.

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After the time of prayer ended, the congregation went back

out into the courtyard... following Peter.

Peter and his companions stopped at the eastern wall and addressed the crowd at Solomon's Porch. Peter refused to take personal credit for the miracle... *It was not my power or piety that made him walk; this was the work of almighty god: the God of our ancestors; the God of our rabbi Jesus - who the citizens of this city allowed Pontious Pilate to execute.*

Jesus was more than a servant of God, he was the son of God... the messiah, the christ. God raised Jesus from the dead.

It was faith in Jesus' name that gave this man the perfect health that you see today.

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There is wonderful symbolism that this teaching and encouragement happened at the porch ... the place of entrance and exit.

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Porches are not a common feature on houses in our part of western Canada. It is probably due to the practical nature of the fact that we only get a couple of months a year, where we might get to just sit out there and enjoy the view.

Besides, we are more back deck people than front porch folk.

But, I know that we all can relate to the imagery of the porch.

It is a place where we are greeted when we arrive. It is

where we are encouraged as venture out. And it is the place of rest and observation... where guests are eagerly awaited... a place to sip the morning coffee or the night cap... a place to see the first light of a new day or welcome the first stars of night.

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This congregation is fond of its motto.
Welcoming In ~ Reaching Out.

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Those are porch words.

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This building is our sanctuary... our place of rest, rejuvenation, the house of prayer and learning, of community.

This sanctuary is a place where we feed and are fed (figuratively and literally).

We want this place to be warm (figuratively and literally).

We want this place to be safe (figuratively and literally).

More on that after church.

This building is our refuge, but more than that it is our home base.

St. David's is not a church.

It is where **we** learn to be the church.

- to celebrate God's presence,
- to live with respect in Creation,
- to love and serve others,

- to seek justice and resist evil,
- to proclaim Jesus, crucified and risen, our judge and our hope.

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Welcome in.

Reach out.

But more than that... Venture out.

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Let us pray:

God of All, guide us to the streets, shelters, prisons. Show us refugees, runaways, and those with the deepest needs. May they - in us - see and know your compassion. Amen.

#144MV "Like a Healing Stream"