**Acts 3:1-10**

**Principles for Mission**

We are continuing our series of sermons today from the Book of Acts in the Bible on the nature of the church: what the church is and what it is for.

At the beginning of March, we started by thinking about the purpose of the church: to be a people of mission, going out in the power of God. Then we thought about the need for prayer and how our prayers should underpin all that we seek to do and be. Last week, we thought about how the church is called to proclaim the Gospel, not just in our deeds, but in our words too: actually telling people about God’s love for them so that they can know God for themselves and respond to him.

And today, we are thinking about what our mission actually is and how we need each other to work together to achieve that mission and the fact that we are undertaking everything we do in the power and authority of God.

And the mission of St. Andrew’s Church is carried out in many, diverse ways. And it’s good for us as a family to celebrate the diversity of what we do. And that’s why we have left up today, for all of us to see, the set-up for the Youth Church that we launched on Thursday in the side chapel. We could have set it up and then packed it away immediately - but then you would not have got a visual sense of what it looks like and what we did on Thursday.

It was a great launch, and thanks go to Nana and Jo and Ruth for all their hard work on this. We had about 25 young people come through the doors on Thursday. They ate hot dogs and drank hot chocolate, we had Christian music playing and the display boards up that you can see, and please do have a closer look after this service. And we chatted with the young people about the Christian faith, and some of the young people asked us to pray with them about issues that they are facing in their lives and to pray that they would stay safe in this area during a time of increased knife crime and violence.

It was a beautiful occasion and we look forward to seeing the Youth Church develop as the months go by. So please pray for this really important initiative because we are hoping to reach a group in our community with the Gospel who it is so hard to reach, but who desperately need to know God’s love and care for them.

And in order to develop as a Mission-Shaped Church, we must always hold fast to our Mission Statement, which is on the inside of the pewsheet: “Building community together on the values of Jesus”.

And to do that, we need to be increasingly creative and increasingly think outside the box so that we can meet people where they are at in their lives and present the Gospel to them in a meaningful way that will offer them the opportunity to have their lives transformed in the way that they need.

And that’s what we saw in the first reading we had today from the Books of Acts: a wonderful story of how two of Jesus’ disciples took the opportunity to meet with a man in need and bring him a deeper experience of healing than he could possibly have hoped for.

Let’s just recap the story…

We hear in verse 1 that Peter and John were going to the Temple to pray at 3.00pm in the afternoon. This was a peak time of prayer at the Temple and so there would have been crowds of people around. As they approached, a lame man was being carried in and every day, he sat at the main gate into the Temple. So Peter and John arrive at the Temple and the lame man sitting there asks them for money.

But the disciples don’t have any money to give him. Instead, they have something far more valuable to give away, and in verse 6, Peter says, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!” And immediately, they help the man to his feet and he has been healed and is able to walk again. And there’s this lovely sentence in verse 8: “Then, walking, leaping, and praising God, he went into the Temple with them.”

What an incredible turnaround in his fortunes! He hadn’t expected anything miraculous to occur that day; just to go begging as usual and receive money from kind people. Instead, he was healed and was able to walk again. An incredible miracle…

But what do we have to learn from this story for ourselves at St. Andrew’s? I think it gives us some real insights into our mission as a church and what it is we are called to as a Mission-Shaped Church…

**1. We are called to reach out to the hurting in our community**

I think it’s interesting that this story comes immediately after Pentecost, which is a story about how thousands were coming to the Christian faith through the ministry of the disciples. So we move immediately from the narrative of thousands coming to faith straight into this story of how one, single man came to faith.

And it’s important for us as a church to remember that our concern is with individual people. Of course, we long for the day when crowds of people come into this church to worship God and take part in all the activities - and, in faith, we believe that this will happen. But crowds are made up of individual people and each individual comes with their own needs, joys, sorrows, and celebrations. The church is made up of individuals who each have their own story and reason for being here.

God is interested in you and God is interested in me as individuals, and he knows our hearts and how knows where we hurt, and he wants to heal us from our hurts so that we can know what it is to have fullness of life.

Our mission, as a church, is to reach out to the hurting parts of our community and proclaim healing in the name of Jesus. That hurting in our community takes many forms: it may be physical illness, grief, or broken relationships that many people are enduring. Or it may be loneliness or fear or the rise in knife crime and drug dealing in our churchyard and surrounding area. Hurt comes in many forms and our mission as a church is to speak into the hurt with the healing words of Christ so that we can be agents of healing, agents of wholeness in our community.

We don’t have anything else to offer, do we? But we can bring words of comfort, words of hope, we can offer the hand of friendship, we can listen to people as they talk, we can speak words of encouragement. And we can introduce people to Jesus, which is the greatest, and most simple, gift of all.

So firstly, we are called out to the hurting in our community.

**2. We can only do this mission as a team, working together**

The mission of the church cannot be carried out by one person or just a small group of people. The mission of the church needs all of us to be involved and the reason is that all of us have different gifts, skills and talents and all of us have something positive that we can bring to St. Andrew’s.

It’s interesting that it was Peter and John who were engaged in this miracle because they were such different personalities. Peter was a hands-on, pragmatic, hot-headed, impulsive ‘doer’: he was a working man, a fisherman, with calloused hands and a deep passion. John, as we know from the style of his Gospel, was much more of a philosopher, a deep thinker, more reserved. Peter and John were very different types of people and we know from the Gospels that they often wound each other up. And yet God brought them both into the same family and, together, they were able to work for the good of the Kingdom of God.

Peter and John – as different as they were – complemented each other.

And that’s how we are as a church family: we are all very different as people, and we all have different gifts and talents and we all need one another to bring to this church something unique.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul uses the metaphor of a body to describe the church family: some people are hands, some are feet, some are eyes, some are hands and together we can act as one body. We need each other. And the local community needs us to work effectively together so that we can fulfill our mission as a church and really make an impact on local community transformation for God.

So firstly, our mission is to reach those who hurt with the healing Gospel of Christ.

Secondly, we can only do this if we work together, as our Mission Statement says: “Building community together on the values of Jesus”.

Thirdly, and finally,

**3. Our mission is dependent on the authority of God, not our own strength**

In verse 6 of our reading from Acts, Peter says this to the man: “I don’t have any money for you. But I’ll give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk!”

That’s such an important phrase: “In the name of Jesus Christ…”

Peter was not a healer. Peter was not a miracle worker.

Instead, Peter was just an ordinary human being, like you and me, but he knew that God had the power to heal and so he called on the authority and power of God, in the name of Jesus

to bring about the healing that the man needed.

The same is true of us: we are ordinary people, with ordinary gifts and talents; we are not miracle workers…

But we do have a relationship with a God who is extraordinary, a God who is a miracle worker, a God who has the power and authority to transform lives and communities. And it is in his power that we move forward as a Mission-Shaped Church

So, our mission, then, is to bring healing to a hurting community. We need to work together to achieve that. And we can only do it in the power and authority of God.

We have little, in and of ourselves, to offer people: we do not have an endless pot of resources in terms of time and money. We are not miracle workers. But we do know a God who is limitless in his power to transform and we minister to others in his strength.

And, as the Bible says, “Nothing is impossible with God”.

So let us be confident as a church, and let our confidence rest in God because, in his strength, anything is possible…