

The Way to Change the World
Acts 3:1–10

Welcome to Memorial Day weekend and the unofficial start of summer. I thought it appropriate to warn you about some of the activities you might choose this holiday weekend.

You could watch television and could lose the remote. If so, know that there's a nearly 50 percent chance that your lost control is stuck between your sofa cushions. Four percent of lost remotes are found in the fridge or freezer; two percent turn up in the car or outdoors.

If you plan to go fishing, be careful. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics, fishing is the most dangerous occupation in America. It ranks nearly four times higher than roofers, electrical power-line installers and repairers, and even miners.

Keep an eye on the sky while you're outside. Half a million pieces of space junk are orbiting around our planet. The European Space Agency's Orbital Debris Office tells us that there's a one-in-100-billion chance you'll be severely injured by falling space junk this year.¹

If you're driving, watch out for the rest of us. According to the American Automobile Association, 35 million Americans will be traveling on our nation's roads this weekend.

In the midst of all the activities of the weekend, our nation pauses to remember the 1.3 million men and women who have died in the service of our country and our freedom. Many consider this holiday to be "America's most solemn occasion." At 3:00 Monday afternoon local time, a moment of remembrance will take place. All Americans are asked to pause for one minute of reflection, gratitude, and unity.

On this Memorial Day Sunday, how can we do for others what our fallen heroes have done for us? [P] We all want to leave a legacy, to live a life that matters. We want to give our lives to a worthy cause. In today's story, we will learn how. This morning, we will discover a simple fact: *We change the world one person at a time.*

See the One (vs. 1–5)

As Acts 3 opens, we find Peter and John on their way to the temple for worship. It's three in the afternoon, and everything is as routine as it gets. They've been going to the temple in Jerusalem for worship since they were twelve. They've climbed the steps through the Gate Beautiful while passing beggars along the way, each hoping for money from them. This is the third sacrifice given this very day, their third worship service.

It was all as routine as church can be for us. Drive the same streets, park in the same place, sit in the same pew. If someone gets there before us, there's trouble [P]. It's all routine.

Everything is routine in our story, including this particular beggar. Crippled from birth, he was now more than forty years old (Acts 4:22). Every day since childhood he was laid by this gate to beg from these worshippers. So he saw Peter and John on their way into the temple and asked them for money.

Now comes the surprise: *"Peter looked straight at him, as did John"* (v. 4). The Greek word means to stare with intense purpose. It's the word used for the apostles as they stared at the ascending Christ (Acts 1:10) and for Stephen as he stared at the enthroned Lord while he was dying (Acts 7:55). Others saw, but Peter and John looked. Others heard, but they listened. Others rushed by, but they stopped. They saw the one. They saw his need. And they cared. [P] That's where ministry begins.

Jess Moody asks us: *"Have you ever taken a real trip down inside the struggling heart of another? To feel the sob of the soul – the rawness of the agony found there? To have this become almost as much yours as that of your soul-crushed neighbor? This is the beginning of compassion."*

Do you have time for the one? Who did you pass on your way to this temple? Who will you pass tomorrow? Who needs your compassion?

Trust the Name (v. 6).

But compassion cannot do much good without the power to help. Clearly, this man needed help beyond human capacity. So Peter said, *"Silver or gold I do not have."* But then he added, *"What I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk"* (v. 6).

The *"name"* means the person, character, and presence of Christ. It offers the power and strength of the One who opened blind eyes, and raised dead bodies, and was himself raised from Calvary's cross to Easter's victory.

Peter trusted in Jesus' name – His authority and power – because he met Jesus' power personally. He felt His forgiveness and knew His grace. What Jesus did *for* him, He could do *through* him.

Believe that the same is true with your life as well. You and I are the body of Christ. What Jesus did through the flesh, he now wants to do through us by the power of His Spirit. No one is beyond our help, because no one is beyond His.

Our sun is 870,000 miles in diameter. If we reduce it to 6 inches, by that scale, Mercury is 7 yards away, the Earth 18 yards away (and the size of a speck of dust), Pluto 710 yards away, and the nearest star 2,000 miles. And there are one hundred quintillion [100,000,000,000,000,000,000 (10x20)] other such stars in the known universe.

Our God made all that. Now, what's your problem?

Touch the Pain (vs. 7–10)

Here's the last step to making Jesus' ministry and purpose ours: *"Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk"* (vs. 7–8a). See the one, trust the name, and touch the pain.

This was courageous on Peter's part. Jewish theology in that day taught that a man born crippled was born with sin in his life (cf. John 9:2). You weren't to touch such a person. You might toss him some money, but it was best not to become involved personally. You would be as unclean spiritually as he was.

But Peter didn't just touch him—the Greek says that he "grabbed" him. In that instant, God healed him. Because Peter was willing to touch his pain. The man's physical healing led to his spiritual healing (v. 8) and to his public witness (v. 9-10). All because a follower of Christ (like you or me) saw him, trusted God's power for him, and touched him. [P]

Who did this for you? [P] My Grandma Julie made time for me when I was small child. She shared the wonder of God's Word with me. She and my mom brought us to Sunday school, and worship, and kids club, where we discovered the irresistible love of Jesus and His power over death itself and the life He offered me then, and the life He offers me now! They saw me; they trusted in Christ's power to save; they lifted me up; and God did the rest.

You'll be in heaven because someone saw you, trusted Christ, and touched your life. [Pause] Who will be in heaven because of you? [Pause]

On this Memorial Day weekend, remember George Bernard Shaw's words: "This is the true joy in life ... being used for a mighty purpose, even one unrecognized by all those around you." Are you dedicated to a mighty purpose? One which is worth your life and your all? A cause worth its cost?

In the movie *Chariots of Fire*, the English runner Harold Abrams races against the Scottish champion Eric Liddell and loses. It's the first loss of his life. The pain of his failure is so great that he tells his girlfriend he will never race again. "If I can't win, I won't run," he insists. She wisely replies, "If you don't run, you can't win."

Today we remember 1.3 million men and women who ran the race for us and won the freedom we celebrate this day. Now we must answer their sacrifice with our own. We are called to a mighty purpose, to a cause worth its cost.

We change the world one person at a time. Whose soul will you touch today?

¹Statistics are from Natalie Wolchover, "8 Weird Statistics About Daily Life," *Live Science*, (<http://www.livescience.com/33657-8-weird-statistics.html>).