

California-Nevada Conference of The United Methodist Church  
Strategy Summit  
January 14, 2017  
Acts 3:1-10

This passage from Acts is one of my favorite passages of holy scripture! It is full of courage and boldness! It is wondrous and marvelous as it reveals what God is able to do! It shows us who we, you and I, as disciples of Jesus, are and can be.

Gathering for a Strategy Summit implies that we are those who plan to journey forth. As leaders of the California-Nevada Conference of The United Methodist Church we gather knowing that we are here to lead God's people on the journey ahead. Most importantly, as disciples of Jesus Christ we understand ourselves to be those who share the mercy and grace we have received and known in Jesus. And God knows, and we know, that the world is in need of those who believe there is a future worth journeying to, in need of leaders to show the way, and in need of those who can shape the world into being a world of mercy, grace and justice.

Talking about mercy, grace and justice, I just read an article about the fact that we can no longer measure poverty, by the old government formula of taking income, the size of one's family, what food costs and adjusting it all according to inflation. Studies that have been recently done show clearly that we now have to add to this formula the cost of housing and medical care to have a more accurate measurement of poverty. In our area with the high cost of housing and the rising cost of medical care all across this country, we know this. In fact, using the new formula to determine real poverty, puts California and Nevada in the top 10 states in the country with the highest poverty levels. But you and I knew this. In spite of the beautiful homes and the golden dazzle of our cities you and I know that we are facing poverty, real and extreme poverty. All we have to do is look around and be attentive.

Peter and John one day found themselves at the very door of the golden dazzle and beauty of their time. They had gone to the temple in Jerusalem, built to house the presence of God, built with such white stones and golden gilding that it could blind you in the sunlight. So amazingly lovely that even its entryways were called such names as the Beautiful Gate.

Peter and John were headed into the temple through the Beautiful Gate that day to pray. But before they could enter, they could not help but hear and then see a man, crippled from birth, begging for alms. It was what Jesus had taught them; to look around and be attentive!

This morning driving here I was listening to CNN on the radio and was reminded that on this day people are gathered all over this country and especially in Washington DC led by young DACA leaders to give witness to the importance of supporting young immigrants who are here because

they were brought to this country as children with no say in the matter and who know no other country than this one. Hashtag *Here to Stay* is their message. They are like the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate – he was there to stay!

Now, we should remember what happened because Peter and John stopped for the crippled man. Stopping to connect with the crippled man would give Peter an incredible opportunity to give witness to the mighty good news of Jesus the Christ to the masses. It would also get Peter and John put in jail! However, it would also stir up the entire Christian community to prayer and the Holy Spirit would come down upon them! All because they did what Jesus always does – they noticed the suffering of one who was also a child of God, they stopped and cared for him, and extended to him the healing mercy of Jesus.

You know the story. Peter looked at the crippled man, and said to him what was true: Peter and John did not have the silver or gold, the resources to respond to the fullness of the crippled man's need, but Jesus did! Jesus has all the resources necessary to get us on our feet! So Peter took the man by the hand and said to him, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up! Get up and journey with us into the life that God has for you and for us." And the man got up, by the power of our loving Lord, Christ Jesus, who always sees our suffering and responds to our cry.

As United Methodists we talk a great deal about transformation. Friends, this was a transformative moment! Because of Peter and John's faithfulness many others came to know Christ in that moment, and to love him and serve him. And I suspect that it wasn't just those outside of the temple at the Beautiful Gate who experienced this incredible transformation, but even some who were inside the temple. Isn't that the way it always is.....

In the coming days our country will be receiving a new President. Some say not much will change in this country. Others are fearful that our country will change for the worse. In the midst of these days of transition, of apathy and of fear, you and I are not only called to be disciples of Jesus the Christ, we are called to lead God's people to be the Church of the One who does change all things, for the common good; who comes to fulfill God's hope of a world reconciled to God's own self, and thus a world where we are reconciled with one another and with all of creation.

On this day there are those who are suffering who see our church buildings as beautiful gates to a bit of mercy. Let us not ignore or fail them.

On this day there are those who long to be heard as they cry out from their pain. Let us not be deaf to their cry.

On this day there are those whose hearts expect nothing more than a handout. Let us offer them the fullness of the grace and mercy of our Lord Christ Jesus.

You and I are called to lead God's people in all these good ways and so many more.

We may not have the silver or the gold that the world uses to measure what is possible. Let us remember the higher truth: we have Jesus to share; Jesus in whom all things are possible!

Let us journey forth, committed to being faithful disciples of Jesus the Christ, and faithful leaders of his Church.

Bishop Minerva G. Carcaño