

The thing that really leaps out at me in this passage is the word in verse 8, that tells us the man was jumping after Peter had healed him. Maybe that isn't something we expect from a man 40 years old, as chapter 4 verse 22 tells us. When Peter says those words, "In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, walk," we think he is going to get up and walk- we have read enough in the gospels and know the stories of Jesus healing cripples and paralytics and the blind and the deaf, so this healing doesn't surprise us. And the man, lifting up his voice to praise God would be the normal reaction, too, don't you think? But his leaping up and down seems out of the ordinary. This is a man who had never used his legs, born this way, verse 2 tells us, and it just seems to me he would be a little more tentative, or that he would be a little bit more beaten down by the world- for forty years he had lived in poverty, never moved from one place to the next except when someone had carried him.

I do like the way the author writes this story. After Peter says those powerful words that heal, he reaches down to help him up; and it must be that the man can already feel the strength in his muscles, for he leaps to his feet; and then "he stood." He had the strength to do whatever he wanted, but he needed a moment to get his balance; or perhaps that phrase, "he stood" means that he needed

a moment for the wonder of it to sink in, for his mind to catch up to his body. And then he walked. He didn't crawl, or take baby steps, he had full grown muscles and so he simply walked. And then he does the most surprising thing of all: he goes to church.

Now, I know we will all say that is the right place to be. He should give thanks for the miracle, he should rejoice for his healing, for his brand new legs. Of course, that's correct, but that's also the point- when was the last time you came to church leaping and praising God, for the spiritual healing God gives, for God's love, for the forgiveness and hope Jesus the Messiah gives? It is probably a long time since we were really, really excited about meeting with others to worship God. And yes, the preacher should take much of the blame for that. But isn't it more than anything else that we don't pause to remember what God has done, how broken and hopeless and hurt we would be without God's strength and his presence with us? Maybe we think that we could live just fine without God. Many people seemingly do. But the man in our passage knows better. For forty years he had survived as a beggar, maybe a successful one, and now God's good news comes into his life and he is made whole, but he doesn't pout and think, "Oh, man, there goes my career!" No, he leaps for joy and praises God. Perhaps we should take

our cue from this beggar and pause a moment before we start walking, or driving anywhere, or doing anything at all, and let our minds catch up and ponder the miracle of our lives and the power and goodness of the One who has healed and forgiven us, who has called us together, and called us to be with him; there we discover what we perhaps have tried to hide from ourselves, the meaning of our lives, and realize that in that name is the only way we can be made whole. With the idea of the presence of the Lord among us, and that we are crippled without him, then it does make sense to come to church leaping and praising God. And if the sermon does fall short from time to time, well, maybe that's ok, too.

I searched "vertical leap" on the internet, and found exercises that strengthen particular muscles to improve one's leaping ability and dozens of videos of athletes leaping. There is one video of a football player who takes just a couple of steps to get started, jumps straight up, tucks his feet up under him, and clears a bar placed at 66 inches off the ground. Now, I don't really think our beggar was so athletically gifted as to leap that high. But it doesn't negate the miracle if he is unable to find a new occupation as a professional athlete: he has a new occupation as God's man; his healing is not just a physical healing, but also spiritual. He doesn't just walk and leap, but shouts praises to God. It isn't that now he can run

and jump, but that the Lord of creation has entered his life. Not only is his body now perfect, it is also the temple of God's Spirit- and with his body, just as with his mouth, he is a witness (an important word from chapter 1 of Acts) to the healing and forgiveness of God; a witness along with all those others of the community of faith we noted last week, from the last verses of chapter 2, this community where everyone shared all things, where none among them went hungry, or lacked anything, but they worshiped together, and learned and prayed together.

From the first words of Peter, the beggar becomes a participant in that community; Peter *shares* with him what he has: not gold and silver, but the name of Jesus. Peter looked long at the man, stared intently at him- this Greek word is tied in with other miracles of Jesus and Paul, and visions and amazing events. Here, Peter sees before him a person held captive, but also a person whom God loves already; and by the healing of the man's legs, his body is made whole and free, and at that point he also learns that God loves him, in the name of Jesus. It is a physical and a spiritual healing.

Is it fair to say that we want to be whole and complete spiritually, and be close to God, but also have enough gold and silver that we needn't worry, and

enough that we can contribute to our church and other good causes? I don't want to say that we cannot possess things and at the same time be possessed by God's Spirit, but scripture informs us that at the least it is difficult, and that, assuredly, one is to be sought over the other: when we get self-sufficient, we lose the sufficiency that is from God; when we can survive under our own power, we may forfeit the Power that is from God.

There is a wonderful story, that one day the Catholic theologian Thomas Aquinas paid a visit to Pope Innocent II just while the Pope was counting a pile of money. And the Pope waved Aquinas into the room, and said, "You see, Thomas, the church can no longer say, 'I have no gold and silver.'" And Aquinas replied, "You are correct, Holy Father, but also, no longer can the church say, 'Arise and walk.'"

In some ways a long time ago the church lost the presence and power of the Holy Spirit. If we are busy promoting ourselves, or the name of our particular branch of Christianity, we have given up the Name that heals and forgives. We must acknowledge the way the world works, and it doesn't take a genius to know that the church needs money to carry on. But the church does not require possessions or savings accounts, but people who will give up their money, and

more than money, so that the church can feed another hungry person, so that the church can live out its witness and mission; can heal and preach and teach the gospel of Jesus, can speak his name with passion and power- that his blessing may come to those who will hear that good word. All of us need to be filled with such joy and hope in that name, that our hearts leap knowing we are healed; then, we can be witnesses to a crippled world, and say, “Arise and walk”; so that others, then, may find healing, and experience the love of God, and find peace and joy in his Name and friendship in the communion of his saints.

We might read this passage thinking that the only way to live is to be always jumping around because God has filled us up. King David danced before the Lord in his exuberance (actually he didn't dance in his exuberance- he danced in his birthday suit!); the apostles were so filled with the Holy Spirit on Pentecost that people thought they were drunk; Paul spoke in tongues and saw visions; the Old Testament prophets heard God speak out of heaven, and out of fire and wind, out of political events, out of their personal discouragement and hurt. Spiritual excitement and “godly leaping” are good things; we want to build up the spiritual muscle to do these, but spiritual muscles are not like physical muscles. Spirituality

is not our ability to leap high and stay excited or giddy all the time, somehow above it all, but spirituality is in our humility, to be able to bow low and to pray; and to let God's Spirit come down and join with us, to fill us and give us his own strength.

Maybe our lives in Christ should be like this: as the church, we should be like Peter in this story, depending absolutely upon the grace of Jesus and the power of the Spirit within us, that we may call on persons to repent and to be healed and to rejoice; but as individuals we should find our example in the beggar- for like him we are needy and weak- and like him, we exist desperate to hear the good word and to find health and new life; and like him, in the name of Jesus we are given the strength and power of God's Spirit to jump and shout, and live day by day, in the superabundance of the love he has put within us.