

April 19, 2015
 Sermon for Third Sunday of Easter
 St. Peter Lutheran Church
 Bowie, TX
 Larry Knobloch, Pastor
 Acts 3:11-21

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Acts 3:11–21 (ESV)

¹¹ While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's. ¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?" ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you, ¹⁵ and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And his name—by faith in his name—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all. ¹⁷ "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers. ¹⁸ But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled. ¹⁹ Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out, ²⁰ that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and that he may send the Christ appointed for you, Jesus, ²¹ whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago.

Acts 3:22–26 (ESV)

²² Moses said, 'The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you. ²³ And it shall be that every soul who does not listen to that prophet shall be destroyed from the people.' ²⁴ And all the prophets who have spoken, from Samuel and those who came after him, also proclaimed these days. ²⁵ You are the sons of the prophets and of the covenant that God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'And in your offspring shall all the families of the earth be blessed.' ²⁶ God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness."

Grace, mercy, and peace from the one who touches our lives, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

There aren't very many experiences that are truly universal, but I'll bet I can think of one. I imagine that just about everyone here has played baseball at least once. And I'll bet that everyone here has struck out. If you have not done it yourself, you have seen it done in person, heard it on the radio or seen it on TV.

What do you remember? I don't mean as an athlete—what your batting statistics were or what your strategy might have been.

What do you remember about how that experience felt—striking out? You've waited in the lineup for a long time to get a turn at bat. Now that it's finally your turn, you have to walk out there all by yourself.

Standing there at the plate, swinging your bat around, you might feel kind of tough. You're the one with the big wooden stick, and you can just imagine yourself plastering that ball and knocking it over the fence.

So you step into the batter's box in front of all those people; I can still remember clearly the first time I was at bat; probably 40 years ago.

I got set like I was taught, I looked toward the pitcher and . . . bam! The ball snaps into the catcher's mitt and the umpire calls, "Strike 1!"

Oh, that feels so stupid! How could I have let that go by? I got distracted. First time batting and all. I better swing this time. If I don't swing, I won't hit it. The pitcher winds up and throws and I swing the bat with all my strength!

You've been there, you know how it goes.

You swing so hard it makes you step forward out of the box, but then you realize that you did not hit anything.

You tried so hard you closed your eyes and the ball went right past you. Now it's trouble time. You've got two strikes. My teammates are going to give me a hard time; they're going to make fun of me. The coach is yelling, my parents were probably sitting in the stands looking concerned and a little embarrassed.

I remember thinking...one more chance. I can't afford to mess this one up in front of everybody. I got this! This time I'm going to do everything right!

The right stance. The right grip. The right concentration on the ball. It is a good pitch? Is it too high? Is it a little outside? Is it going to be a ball? By the time all of those thoughts made it through my head, it was too late. The ball went by and I heard that unmistakable sound of the ball hitting the leather of the catcher's mitt. Wait, how did it even get there?

It's the worst feeling in the world as umpire yells loudly, "**Strike 3!; you're out!**" He didn't have to yell, I knew. I was there. Pfft, it felt like the whole world knew.

I wouldn't have been surprised to see it on the evening news that night. . And then I had make that long walk back to the dugout. Still a little numb, still not knowing quite how it happened, but there was no denying it.

It's not like I went down fighting either. It's not like they had to throw me out, I blew it without their help. I didn't make a run for first, burst of running and blaze of glory. Just a long trudge back to the condemning glances of your friends and family.

Do you know what it means to fail?

Do you know how it feels in that moment when you realize what you've done?

Do you remember the lecture—maybe it was only a few sentences, but it felt like it lasted for hours, as if they were just laying on the guilt.

“Didn't I tell you about this?” your father asks. “Don't you know better than to do that?”.

Your mother lectures, “Honey, didn't you promise me? Haven't we been over this before?”.

Your spouse says to you for the hundredth time. “I thought I told you last time”.

Your boss says. “Weren't you at the meeting? Weren't you paying attention? Do you have any idea how much this is going to cost the company?”

It might only last a minute—maybe even less—but it feels like a hundred years. It feels as if every word is dropping another load of bricks onto your back. It feels as if you'll never recover from your failure.

If you know that feeling, then listen again to our Scripture lesson where Peter is addressing the crowd. Peter and John have healed a man who was born with crippled legs, and it was such a remarkable miracle, such a startling miracle, that everyone is running around talking about it.

The man himself is walking and leaping and praising God. And now, in this happy crowd, Peter gives them “what for”:

¹² And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: “Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk? ¹³ The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and

the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, *whom you delivered* over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him. ¹⁴ But *you denied* the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted *to you*, ¹⁵ and *you killed the Author of life*, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses. ¹⁶ And *his name—by faith in his name*—has made this man strong whom you see and know, and the faith that is through Jesus has given the man this perfect health in the presence of you all.
(vv 12–16, emphasis added)

We saw what you did, Peter says. God finally sent the answer to all of our prayers, and you killed him!

“You handed him over to be killed”: strike 1!

“You disowned the Holy and Righteous One”: strike 2!

“You killed the author of life”: strike 3!

Imagine the crushing impact of Peter’s words. They were caught in their rejoicing and excitement, and their happiness was turned into shame.

The Jesus who had made this man walk was the very same Jesus whom they had killed.

The One whom God had appointed was the very One whom they had betrayed.

The One whom all the prophets had announced and for whom they had all been waiting expectantly was the very same Messiah whom they had disowned, denied, beaten, and killed. “*You killed the author of life.*”

“But God raised him from the dead.”

Peter laid the burden of the Law on the shoulders of his now silent listeners. He crushed them with the truth of their sin.

But then he opened a window of hope.

Growing up, I made a lot of mistakes around the house. I liked to take things apart to figure out how they worked. I liked to push the limits on the tools that I used too. I broke a few shovel handles, boogered up a few screws, and ended up wasting more time by having to go to my step-dad and tell him what I had done...again.

I might get a fussing and learn a new German word, but then, sometimes he would do what kinda what Peter did. I remember how that felt too. He'd leave what he was doing and come to fix what I had done. I knew my step-dad could fix anything. Instead of making me figure it out, he was going to show me where I went wrong. And then we would fix it together and make it right.

I'll never forget him telling me that there is nothing that can't take ne taken apart where there wasn't a way to put it back together.

When my step-father came alongside of me and fixed my mistakes, I knew that I wasn't just forgiven; I was loved. Half of the stuff I do today with my hands, I do because he gave me the confidence to try without being afraid to fail.

Now think about Peter...

He said: "You killed the author of life," And like a bomb, his words must have destroyed them. Yet, peter didn't stop there.

"But God raised him from the dead" (v 15)!

God fixed what we had totally destroyed. "We are witnesses of this" (v 15),

Peter told them to look at what God had done. God repaired this man's withered and shriveled legs and made him leap and dance for joy. And now, He has this new life for you as well.

No matter how badly you've failed, no matter how deeply you've stained your life, no matter how completely you've shattered your hopes, "*you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers*" (v 25). "*When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you*" (v 26). You're still God's children. You're still welcome at home.

"Strike 3!"

You know what that means. It means it's all over.

You're a failure.

You're totally and completely out.

No more chances. But

God Says, "**Strike 3: You're Home Safe!**"

In spite of your sin, in spite of your failure, in spite of the stain you could never remove, your Father forgave you.

And more than forgiveness, your Father loved you. He patiently, lovingly, and determinedly worked out His great plan. Over the centuries, He laid every piece in place, and at last He gave His beloved Son. He placed the life of His Son in the hands of people like you, who abused Him, rejected Him, disowned Him, and killed Him. And God, your Father, fulfilled every promise He had made to purchase you back from sin and death.

Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds
through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the glory