

Acts 3:1-10  
Getting More Than We Bargained For  
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Joey DiJulio of Seattle got more than he bargained for. You see, he received an email inviting him to the bachelor party for someone in Philadelphia. He looked at the cc line and there were 40 or 50 other invitees; problem was, none of them looked familiar.

“I studied each address, racking my brain for a number of minutes, but couldn’t figure out who I knew or why I was invited,” he added. “Then, it dawned on me – I wasn’t invited! Except, I was. Just by mistake.”

As the days and weeks went on, Joey would find periodic updates in his inbox. Things like the schedule of festivities, hotel details, March Madness viewing get-togethers, a shuffleboard tournament, and card games. It actually sounded like a lot of fun.

“At first, I questioned if I should write back and be removed from any further emails. But seeing as how many of the replies were generally entertaining to read, I thought that, perhaps, I’d just remain a ‘fly on the wall’ for the time being.”

Then the day came where the organizer of the bachelor party asked for a firm head count, and Joey had to respond. So, on a whim, Joey decided to reply back to everyone with the following:

*Hi All,*

*So, I have no idea who any of you guys are, but I have been enjoying hearing about the plans for this bachelor party over the last few months.*

*I’m assuming my E-Mail address was added to the list by mistake (perhaps a typo of someone else?). I live out in Seattle, WA and although for a moment I thought it might be funny to just show up and be that guy nobody knows but everyone wonders “who is that guy?”, buying a plane ticket for a cross-country flight just to crash a bachelor’s party might be a bit over the top (although it would be epic!). Nonetheless, I do hope you guys have a great time and I’d like to take a moment to wish the best of luck in life to the groom! Cheers! Joey*

To his surprise, this is what Joey got in reply: “*Hey guys, I say everyone forks up an extra \$20 and we get Joey a plane ticket to Philly!*”

And then came a reply from the groom: “*Joe, I’m over-nighting you a wedding invite. You show up at the bachelor party and I’ll make you my best man. You can give the toast even! Jeff*”

What kind of news is this? In what world does something so incredible, something so ludicrous, something so improbable actually happen? Can this news really be true? This is the kind of news you and I are invited to believe is actually true at Easter. It’s the kind

of news that tells us it's not just relief that's in store, but Easter tells us that new life bursts forth from our tombs, with Jesus leading the way. Easter, it seems, by its very nature is the epitome of you and me getting more than we bargained for.

This morning, we're going to hear another story that invites us to ask the question: "Could it really be true?" So I want to invite you to reach for a copy of Scripture, either the one you brought with you or the one we've made available to you in the pew racks, and turn with me to Acts chapter 3, the first 10 verses. And out of respect for the inspiration and authority of God's Word, if you're able, would you please stand with me? Listen as I read the account of Peter and John healing the lame beggar in Jesus' name.

**Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour. And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple. Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms. And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us." And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!" And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. And leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. And all the people saw him walking and praising God, and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.**

This is the Word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. And may the same Holy Spirit that inspired the writing and preservation of these words, inspire them now in our hearing as well. Amen. You can be seated and let's pray.

*Let the Good News come now, Father, not only in word but also in power, and with great assurance. As we look up toward you from the state of our lives, may we hear the words of hope that breathe not just relief, but full renewal. Speak to us by your Holy Spirit of the riches of your grace, and strengthen our capacity to love and serve you, by loving and serving others. In Jesus' mighty name, Amen.*

Our story this morning is filled with people who get more than they bargained for. Luke, the writer of Acts, tells us that the disciples were heading up to worship at the temple at about three o'clock in the afternoon. This was commonplace for the devout. Afternoon prayers were their time to recharge and connect with one another. But do you notice how even our spiritual routines can get interrupted with moments, opportunities for grace to show up? That "Sweet Hour of Prayer" really isn't meant to draw us out of a world of care, but make us more aware to the cares of our world. Luke makes it clear: worship is never a detour around the needs of others.

I don't know if any of you noticed something that happened in Wabash a few weeks back. For about 5 days, a man who went by the name "Homeless Harry" pushed his shopping cart carrying his belongings around Wabash. He was homeless by choice, and his mission was to raise awareness about the way we interact with the homeless. Harry didn't want to pan handle, what he wanted was to talk to people like you and me about how they interact with the homeless. "Many stopped and asked me if there was anything I needed, but others—not knowing what to say—simply put their heads down and walked by."

You never know what kind of opportunity or blessing might be looking you in the eye if you avert them and keep walking.

Luke goes on to describe a beggar who's lame from birth and was brought each day to one of the outer gates, one that common people had access to, one they called the Beautiful Gate. The Jewish Historian Josephus writes: "Nine gates were completely overlaid with gold and silver, but one outside the sanctuary, was of Corinthian Bronze (some of the most precious metal there was), and far exceeded in value all the others." Here at the most beautiful and ornate places of God's temple, where people were transfixed by the glory in that place, was a 40 year old beggar shaking people down for their spare change, quite a dichotomy.

And this man does what dependent, helpless people often do—he asks for a handout—because it's the best he can do. He probably sets himself up where the religious people will walk past, which if you think about it is a strategic move, religious people, heading to worship. Sounds like an easy mark if I ever heard of one. He probably doesn't even spend much time looking at them, just "alms, alms, alms. You've got places to be and there are a whole lot of you, so let's keep the line moving." This guy probably was so numb to his condition that he just didn't care. Sometimes life can burden us with such insurmountable burdens that we no longer have the strength, let alone the desire, to look for goodness.

Maybe you know what this feels like, or have a family member who does. Doing whatever you have to just to get through the day, to numb the pain, to set aside the worry, to feel that fleeting moment of intimacy. Really, we're all just beggars though, aren't we? We've all been in a place where things haven't gone our way. Maybe for a really long time. Hopes unmet, opportunities missed, dreams unrealized. Sometimes the best we do is just to get by, with one more drink, or one more evening in front of the television, one extra hour at the office because at least it will numb the pain we're in and allow us to escape. Sometimes the best we can do is just to cope.

But Peter and John and the risen Jesus Christ aren't interested in helping us cope. This beggar is about to get more than he bargained for. Do you see what they do? Peter and John fix their gaze upon him and say, "Look at us." People who have lost all dignity and are simply trying to cope, most of the time they aren't looking for a relationship, but that is exactly what he gets. In fact, I want to suggest that this is how authentic community begins. It begins when we stop and actually look at one another. It doesn't begin with

interest inventories, it doesn't begin with programs, it doesn't begin with service projects. Community begins when we stop to see one another as we really are: beggars on the cusp of glory.

CS Lewis has a wonderful quote from a lecture entitled *The Weight of Glory*, he says: *"It would seem that Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about...when infinite joy is offered us, like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea."*

This beggar is about to get much more than he bargained for when Peter looks into his eyes and says: **"Silver and gold I have not, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk."**

The text tells us that Peter and John then reach down, take him by the right hand, and lift him up. And he's so excited and so surprised that he leaps for joy. Apparently he was even a bit of a distraction to the other worshippers, because he was praising so loudly. What a great problem to have, praising too loudly.

But the point of this passage, the miracle that takes place, is not just that a sinner is now a leaper, it's that we are all beggars, and it's only by Jesus' name that we are ever able to regain our footing. And you have that same ability to proclaim Jesus' name and speak his healing to all. Peter, John, you, me, when the Spirit of the risen Jesus Christ comes to rest upon you, he gives you more power than you bargained for. They didn't offer him some gentle platitudes, promising one day things would be better—no, with Jesus healing happens now. The name of Jesus gets people back on their feet.

Now, eventually all the people Jesus touched and healed eventually got sick and died, but the point of this was to show people that anything is possible, that heaven is breaking into our present, and that we are to bear witness to that hope each and every day.

This last week, I was up at Lutheran Hospital visiting one of our members. Point of confession, when I am doing visitation and a doctor or nurse comes in the room, I get a little insecure. They have stethoscopes around their necks and white coats with their names on them. I have an old Bible and a prayer I rehearsed in the car. But as I sat there, two nurses came into the room, and my first instinct was to step back and let the professionals do their work. But they said, "Are you the pastor?" "Yes." "Don't let us stop you, you do your thing and we'll do ours." "Yeah, but I don't want to get in the way if you need to help her." And one of them looked at me and said, "You're a pastor, isn't it your job to bring a little bit of heaven into this room? Like I said, you do your thing." "That's right, that's what I do."

That's what we do. Because when you encounter the risen Christ, when he invites you out of the boat or out of the tax booth, or calls you to pick up your mat and walk, he gives you more than you bargained for. If it's just a little bit of relief you're looking for, he brings healing; if it's salvation, vocation comes with it; if it's holiness you're after, watch

out, because you might just be called to do it in other people's lives, too. Jesus will forever be in the business of offering more than we bargain for.

Joey DiJulio ended up accepting the invitation, he went to the bachelor party, seized his opportunity to become the best man in a perfect stranger's wedding—he even gave the toast. Do what you've got to do, seize the power and the opportunity the Holy Spirit has given you to invoke the healing and life giving name of Jesus Christ. Because in the kingdom of God, beggars are always getting promoted to the head table, the heartbroken become heartthrobs in God's eyes, and those who get passed by are never passed up in God's kingdom economy. Seize the authority that has been given to you, and go do what you gotta do. In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, Amen.