



La Côte Anglican Church

Second Sunday after Easter – Sermon from Alan Amos

14 April 2024 – Morning Prayer in Divonne and Evening Prayer in Gingsins

Of Bible Translations there are many. I have to confess that I still have a fondness for the so-called Authorised version, also known as the King James Version. Perhaps it is my age. But I don't think it is just that. There is a beauty and dignity about the language which cannot be equalled in the modern versions, even if they reach out to us in the language of today. But I recognise that our modern translations into English are a vital help to those whose first language is not English, and in a few instances they are more accurate as they rely on older manuscripts of the scriptures than those available to the King James translators.

It is good to hear the word of God in different translations, and modern translations help us to know that Jesus stands among us in his risen power, and belongs to the world of this day, not just to days of time past. I have chosen for today's readings the New International Version, known as the NIV, - because it is more lively and communicates better in these readings than the rather academic New Revised Standard Version. And in this story from the Acts of the Apostles, it helps us to feel that we are hearing an eye-witness account, not just a report.

However, the NIV translators have tried to be helpful to us by providing headings for the paragraphs of scripture. Usually this works well, sometimes it does not. And I think they made a bit of a mistake with the heading for today's reading from Acts 3. 1 – 19.. It is this first heading of our Acts reading that is the problem. "Peter heals a lame beggar." I wonder if you can see why I think this is a bad heading for the passage. Take another look for a moment at the passage, and then perhaps someone can see what I'm getting...at. well in one sense the heading is correct, but in a more profound sense it is not correct and point us in the wrong direction. For Peter says to the people, "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why to you stare at **us** as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" And the man who was lame reacts to his own healing as follows – he goes into the Temple courts "walking and jumping and praising God." Not a word at this point about thanks to Peter.

Let me tell you a short story: a Western traveller was driving through the Syrian desert to the ancient ruin of Palmyra. Suddenly he saw a car that had broken down by the roadside.

He stopped and he found that the driver was greatly suffering from thirst. So he brought a bottle of water from his own car and gave him a drink. The man got out of his car, fell on his knees and praised God aloud. The Western driver thought perhaps a word of gratitude to him for stopping might have been appropriate. But the thirsty man did not see it like that. And the Westerner thought about it, and learnt something. Sometimes we can be the answer to someone else's prayer, but the one who is at work is God, who deserves the thanks and praise.

So I think a better heading to our story would have been "A lame man is healed through the grace of God in Christ Jesus."

There are three other points I want to make about the story of this man's healing.

First, he was begging at the gate of the Temple; he was an outsider, excluded from the Temple because his disability was seen as a punishment for sin excluding him from the place of worship. But now he leaps and dances in the Temple courtyard for joy. Christ brings in the excluded from outside. And in the life of the Church, he has abolished this exclusion, welcoming all into the family of God.

Second, faith is involved in his healing. But it is not quite what we might expect. Peter and John do not demand a faith response from the beggar before he is healed. He is healed in the Name of the Lord Jesus, but the faith in Jesus is the faith of Peter and John which enables his healing. God heals in response to their faith.

That reminds me of the baptism of infants, where the faith of the Church and of adult believers is relied upon when we call upon God's grace for the infant who needs to receive it for the whole of their life ahead of them.

Thirdly, I can't help thinking about the lame beggar who sits outside the door of our church in Saint Julien en Genevois, just opposite where we live. I see him every day, and usually give him something because I would rather be where I am in my life than where he is in his. And by being there he provides a kind of bridge between the world of those who have, and those who have not. And he does have a gracious smile. I gave him an old winter jacket when he was freezing out there, but I can't raise him up and set him on his feet. Why?

Well that is quite a deep question, there is no straightforward answer except perhaps that I am not an apostle, and that the Resurrection power of Jesus overflowed onto the apostles so that they worked miracles of healing in his Name.

Then I think to myself, miracles of healing do happen these days, but they are very few and far between. we have to rely on God who is with us through illness and suffering; it is right to pray for healing for ourselves and for others. And we live day by day in trust in the one

who is both our Saviour and our healer and will raise us up to himself to share in new life either in this world or in the world to come.

I began by talking about Bible translations, and I am going to conclude by talking about the translation of our second reading from the first Epistle of John, ch.3. 1 – 7. There is one line which is quite different between the NIV and the NRSV. Please look for a moment at verse 5 and 6 of our second reading. “No one who lives in him keep on sinning; no-one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.”

Now compare it with the NRSV which has: No one who abides in him sins, no one who sins has either seen him or known him.

It is important that a Bible translation makes good Christian sense. For if we say that we have not sinned, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Why do we have prayers of repentance in our services if we never sin. And I am thankful that we find that good sense in our NIV translation which recognises both the frailty of our human nature and our need for continual repentance. And for that continuing life of repentance we pray. Let us look at these words once again: “No one who lives in him keep on sinning; no-one who continues to sin has either seen him or known him.” This this translation is a good one, as it recognises the proper use of the Greek present tense which often means a continuing action.

And so... *For all good Bible translators, thanks be to God !*