



St Mary and St Francis, West Wickham
Sermon - Week 6
“The Man at The Beautiful Gate”

If I said to you ‘A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out’ what organisation would come to mind? ‘A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out’ is the motto or logo of the ‘Big Issue’. You’ll recognise the street vendors selling the magazine – there’s invariably a lady selling it outside Sainsbury’s in Station Road. The Big Issue Foundation is an independently funded registered charity, which works exclusively with the Big Issue vendors, connecting them to the vital support they need to enable them to rebuild their lives and determine their own pathways to a better future.

You can now also buy ‘Change Please’ coffee – an enterprise supported by the Big Issue Foundation. Homeless people are taken off the streets, given accommodation, paid the London Living Wage and trained as coffee baristas. They sell this coffee from mobile wagons at various locations including near The Shard, in Canary Wharf and in Borough Market. All the profits go to the vendors. You can also buy ‘Change Please’ coffee from the larger branches of Sainsbury’s and it’s certainly available if you do an online shop. The coffee blends bear the names of former homeless people and you can read their brief story on the packaging. Truly ‘A Hand Up, Not a Hand Out’

In our reading from Acts chapter 3 today, Peter and John made a real connection with the paralysed man outside the Temple gates

and gave him a wonderful 'Hand Up Not a Hand Out'. The man was asking for a 'hand down', but he received something far better – an unbelievable 'hand up'. From asking for 'Change Please' his life was restored to all its fullness. Let's look at this healing miracle in a little detail.

Our bible passage comes directly after the amazing account of the events of the Day of Pentecost. The fledgling church was a truly spirit filled community. So, Peter and John were off to the Temple to pray at three in the afternoon – something they did routinely. On their way into the Temple at a place called 'The Beautiful Gate' they see this man asking for money. That's all he did day in day out – ask people for money. People would carry him to his spot outside the gate and leave him there to fend for himself. And we can just imagine him asking Peter and John 'Got any small change please?' It's something we often see on the streets of our city – people sitting in doorways and on street corners with their empty coffee cups and a little note that reads 'change please'. We are told that Peter and John looked intently at him – and there's the connection – they looked him in the eye. What Peter says next is remarkable.

'I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk.'

And Peter took the man by the right hand and lifted him up. The man literally jumped up and walked into the Temple with them praising God for what had happened. The man was expecting, and indeed asked for, a 'Hand Out' but what he got was a miraculous 'Hand Up'. Peter and John didn't have any money but they had something far more valuable – the power of the Holy Spirit – and the ability to use that power to bring wholeness into a very sad life. In fact one way to describe the Holy Spirit is 'Paraclete' which means 'comforter' or 'helper'. The man at the gate certainly received comfort and help.

There's something else quite telling about the story of this man. He had been marginalised by religion – the law at the time stated that disabled people could not enter the Temple to worship. The religious people shunned him. Those who could, and should have helped him simply dumped him at the Beautiful Gate. Maybe they thought they had done their religious duty by engaging with him and dumping him there before they all went into to their pious worship. Maybe it made them feel good – maybe those who gave him their change felt good before worship. The man was totally dependent on others for his existence. He thought he needed money – what he really needed was healing and wholeness. The man had no real connection to any caring community.

Peter and John on the other hand were connected to a spirit-filled, joyful, caring, compassionate community. That was what they had – no money, simply compassion and a desire to pass on the spirit to this hopeless man. So they made a connection with him too. Through Peter and John, the man was connected instantly to the same community and this connection addressed his real need. They shared their gift of the spirit with him and the spirit brought healing and wholeness. Peter and John took what God was doing amongst that community, rejoiced in it, embraced it's fullness and took it to this desperate man who was hurting, broke, lonely and needy. That's what they had – that gift of the spirit to bring wholeness and healing was 'their such'

So, what do we have to give – what is our 'such'? We do not have the power to miraculously heal, but we do have gifts to help address the needs of those going through their 'storms of life'. How can we be used by God as an instrument of His grace and truth? We take our lead from what Peter and John were experiencing. They were not prevented from helping by what they didn't have (money). They realised what they did have (a

connection to a spirit-filled community of love and compassion, eager to share the good news of Christ). They embraced this connection and gave it to the paralysed man. So they gave him a 'Hand Up, not a Hand Out' - they made an instant connection with him and they used their experience of all that they had learned through Jesus – all their faith, their love, their hope and their compassion – their faith experience if you like – to reach down and lift him up – to bring him from hopeless despair to joyful hope for the future.

So let us commit our lives afresh to God and we pray that He will take us and use us to come alongside those who are going through storms of life. We pray that he may use us to be 'paracletes' – helpers and comforters to those in need, bringing the love and compassion of Jesus into their lives.

***Loving Father, help us to do all the good we can – by all the means we can – in all the places we can – at all the times we can – to all the people we can – as long as we ever can. This we ask in Jesus' name
Amen.***

(A prayer of John Wesley)