

April 19, 2015  
Acts 3:11-21

Easter 3B  
A Lesson From the Leaping Man

*Grace, mercy, and peace be yours from God our Father and from our Risen Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.*

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!**

“Be Careful what you hope for.” Its’ one of the better lessons we learn in life. Ask anyone who’s ever joined one of those get-rich-quick schemes, jumped at a deal that was too good to be true, or taken political promises at face value in an election year. Or better yet, just consider the way you yourself have learned this lesson. We have all learned it: getting our hopes up when hope is not warranted is the worst. This is such a common thing in our lives.

We take that lesson everywhere, even to Scripture. Take for example this passage from Isaiah 35: <sup>3</sup> *Strengthen the weak hands, and make firm the feeble knees.* <sup>4</sup> *Say to those who have an anxious heart, “Be strong; fear not! Behold, your God will come with vengeance, with the recompense of God. He will come and save you.”* <sup>5</sup> *Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf unstopped;* <sup>6</sup> *then shall the lame man leap like a deer, and the tongue of the mute sing for joy.* <sup>1</sup>

Isaiah’s leaping, bounding, hyperbole seems dangerous, doesn’t it? Liable to lift our hopes too high. His language is so picturesque, so vivid and concrete, that he almost makes us think he isn’t using figures of speech. But we seasoned men and women of the world know better than that. We know that if this Word is to speak soberly to us, we must rein in and restrain this image of a leaping lame man as soon as we hear him, right? “The lame man leaps like a deer,” the prophet says. “This means gladness of heart,” we know.

Then again, there is the lame man of Acts 3:11-16. If Isaiah were really on trial here for getting our hopes up, he would be pointing silently at this man.

We first met him a few verse before our Reading for today. He is begging at what was called the Beautiful Gate of the temple in Jerusalem, just as he’d done day after day. As two men approached, he lowered his eyes and raised up his calloused beggar’s hands as he had always done, hoping for some paltry silver. But Christ’s apostles gave him much more than he’d ever hoped for. Peter and John had no silver or gold to give, but what they had they have graciously as proper servants of a mighty, gracious God. “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!” The Word of God went out in power; the lame man got up. Notice: he does not just get up in way we sometimes drag ourselves out of bed in the morning. He **leaps** to his feet. And he doesn’t stop leaping. He **leaps** and **shouts for joy** into the very inner courts. Acts 3:8 says, “*And*

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<sup>1</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Is 35:3–6). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

*leaping up he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.”* In the place of the presence of God, he is *literally* leaping.

It should be no surprise that a crowd gathered round after evening prayer. They gathered, strangely enough, in the very same portico of Solomon where not long before the Jews had asked Jesus, *“How long will you keep us in suspense? If you are the Christ, tell us plainly”* (John 10:24). This time, the crowds have gathered around the Christ’s apostles and around this familiar-faced leaper, and their jaws are on the ground.

They want to know how this has happened. And then comes the bad news. This happened through the powerful name of Jesus, who recently came and preached to them, who fulfilled the Scriptures, and whom they had recently killed and is now living. This lame man stands before them as a living accusation. Peter puts it this way in our text for today: *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.*<sup>2</sup> That was an unexpected and heavy word for crowds who gathered together to marvel at a magic trick.

What you may or may not know is that the lame man also stands as a living, breathing accusation against us as well. This leaping man means that *Isaiah* isn’t on trial here for writing the biblical hope too large. We are on trial here for approaching the promises of Scriptures the way we might approach the promises of a desperate politician behind in the polls: way too small.

The fact is we are prone to take *Isaiah* with a grain of salt. We allegorize away what seems to be too good to be true. We diminish the great promises Christ has won for us by His cross and empty tomb.

The Apostle Paul opens his Epistle to the Romans by declaring that he is not ashamed of the Gospel, though it speaks of bodily resurrection of the dead and the restoration of whole created order. A big hope indeed! Paul’s hope was writ literal and large, and he wasn’t shamefaced about it. Why? Because Paul had already seen a dead man, Christ, resurrected. Paul’s faith was in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the God of the living, the God who had sworn himself to reverse the curse through the offspring of Abraham.

Paul was not ashamed to hold out for a big hope, but we often are. Perhaps this is because we live in an age that has purported to draw a thick line between what is possible and what is not. What does not fit in a test tube or show up in a telescope or submit to repeatable experiment is on the wrong side of the line when it comes to hope. “You will only be disappointed.” This is what we are told. And how quickly we

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<sup>2</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version*. (2001). (Ac 3:14–16). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

acquiesce: “Fine. Isaiah’s leaping man is just a joyful heart.” Christ’s words to the Sadducees who do not believe in resurrection are aptly applied now to us, the very people for whom he died and rose: “*You are wrong,*” Christ says, “*because you know neither the Scriptures nor the power of God*” (Matt. 22:29).

When an almighty God is in the equation, a fine line between what is ultimately possible and what is not just ceases to make rational sense. How easy it’s been to forget that this world of airplanes, plasma screens and vague notions of progress has already seen a resurrection. We do well to remember that gloriously rising from the dead was deemed impossible in the larger Greek and Roman world of Peter and Paul’s day as it is in our own, but the apostles knew it had happened. We tend to allegorize the leaping man, whereas Paul and Peter would have purchased him a trampoline.

And here he is, literally leaping before us in Acts 3, an indictment of those who handed over Christ to be killed, but just as much as an indictment of those who hand over the hope Christ died and rose to win. Thanks be to God, then, that that’s not all the leaping man means.

Peter goes on to announce to the temple crowds that despite the ultimate sin—the ultimate rejection of the things of God, killing the Savior—Israel is not without her Messiah. Christ has been raised! The leaping man is not merely a sign that the people killed Christ. He is also a powerful declaration that Christ has been raised in power and is graciously pouring forth first fruits of creation restoration to every beggarly hand turned his way—even the hands of those who killed him. “<sup>19</sup> *Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,* <sup>20</sup> *that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.*”<sup>3</sup>

And, thanks be to God, the leaping man also points to God’s Gospel for us. The leaping man is a powerful testimony to the fact that big, biblical hope is both warranted and offered freely to every beggarly hand turned Christ’s way—even the hands that once refused it. The leaping man is literally leaping because Christ has literally been raised from the dead and is literally in the business of restoring all things. Best of all, the Messiah whom, Peter reminds us, “<sup>21</sup> *heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago*”<sup>4</sup> is the same Messiah who bore our tragic refusal to love, trust, and obey God above all things. And that refusal, at bottom, is what our hope problem really comes down to.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, not only is a big, bodily, biblical hope warranted, but it is also still for you. Here we were, walking into the sanctuary this morning as spiritual beggars, ready to receive some paltry words of worldly wisdom or maybe even a few nuggets about how to be nice and about heaven when we die. And God’s Word has poured out a hope that is bigger and better than anything we can imagine, for eternity

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<sup>3</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ac 3:19–20). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

<sup>4</sup> *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version.* (2001). (Ac 3:21). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.

and for now—a hope pressed down, shaken together, running over, and being graciously poured into our laps, ears, and hearts! This happens through the absolution, preaching of the word, and when we gather for the Holy Supper of our Lord.

Not only will the lame man's heart rejoice, but also his legs will leap. Not only are our dead in Christ not gone, but they also, with us, are awaiting a reunion and a glorious physical embrace at the resurrection. Not only was the world once created good, but it is also eagerly awaiting with us for the restoration of all things.

Therefore, you of little hope, lift up your eyes! Behold, your gracious and glorious Lord, alive! And remember the lesson of the leaping man: There is something worse than risking hopes set too high: Living our lives without hope in Christ nearly enough!

Praise be God who both offers and secures more for us than we can ever imagine!

Alleluia! Christ is Risen! **He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!** Amen.

*Now may the peace of God which surpasses all human understanding, guard your hearts and your minds and keep them focused in Christ Jesus, our Risen Lord and Savior. Amen.*