

THE REAL CHURCH BEARING REAL FRUIT

Excerpts from a presentation by the Rev. Dr. Joseph W. Daniels, Jr.
at the 2018 East Ohio Annual Conference

Acts 3:1-10

June 17, 2018

It was about a month ago that we celebrated Pentecost – the coming of the Holy Spirit, the coming of power, the birth of a movement that became known as the church of Jesus Christ. Pentecost is about power, God’s power. It’s about the kind of power that can spread out into the streets and result in 2,000 baptisms in just one day.

The first place Peter and John went after being filled with the power of the Holy Spirit was to the temple. They went to the place that had been for them the congregation of the faithful; they went to preach and teach and share the Spirit power that they had received. As they arrived at the temple they came across a man who was lame, he had been unable to walk since birth. The man is begging for help, just like he had been doing for many years. He sees Peter and John and calls out to them for the only kind of help he had ever experienced from those entering the Temple. But Peter and John have no money to give, but what they do have is grace and power. As the man “fixed his attention on them,” he heard Peter say something unexpected, “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.” (vs. 6) In those moments, the grace and power of Jesus Christ forever changed that paralyzed man’s life as he was raised into a holistic life of faith.

Dr. Joseph Daniels, Jr., the lead pastor of the Emory United Methodist Church in Washington DC, presented to us a message and challenge this past Thursday morning of Annual Conference. The Emory church has gone from a worshiping attendance of 50 to 400, and he attributes that to the church becoming a **REAL** church. In describing what it means to be a REAL church, Dr. Daniels raised up Peter and John who when they encountered a paralyzed man, a man who was stuck in a terrible life, hopeless that anything would ever change, they chose to stop that they might bring change to his life. In those moments, the presence and power of God’s spirit led Peter and John to be **REAL**.

Peter and John were **REAL** because they were **relevant**; they met that lame man right where he was – on the street, by the gate, outside the temple – they saw and spoke to the condition with which he had been struggling for years. From that place and that condition, they lifted the man and gave him hope for a new life.

Peter and John were **REAL** because they were **enthusiastic**; they were spirit-filled and passionate about what had happened in their own lives. You may not know this, but the Greek word for enthusiasm means “to be possessed by God.” To be enthusiastic is to be possessed by God and to therefore inspire others to change and embrace Godly possession.

Peter and John were **REAL** because they were **authentic**. They were being exactly who God intended them to be – human and yet spirit-filled. They gave to that man not silver and gold, but they gave him what they had – they gave him their attention and shared with them the grace and power of God’s spirit.

Peter and John were **REAL** because they were **loving**. It was an act of unconditional love and compassion that gave them a heart for the well-being of a man that most other people simply ignored and passed by. It didn’t matter that he was a beggar, a cripple, a man who was stuck in an awful life – a life many in that day would

have said he deserved. The man's race, class, gender had no relevance in the equation because God's unconditional love had gotten a hold of Peter and John.

As individual Christians and as congregations, Dr. Daniels challenged us to remember our baptisms and to consider what it looks like to be completely soaked, saturated and filled by the Holy Spirit. Like a saturated sponge, like Peter and John, we who are baptized should be dripping, "oozing" with the gracious love and power of God's Spirit. If "oozing," then we should certainly be leaving a bit of God's Spirit everywhere we go and with everyone we touch. As individuals and as a congregation, we bear fruit that makes a difference by being **REAL** – by being relevant, enthusiastic, authentic, and loving. Being **REAL** inspires Godly change – it helps people get unstuck from the lives they have been living so that they can experience a holistic life in Christ.

But in order for us to be **REAL** to others, to be vehicles of God's transformation, we may first need to get "un-stuck" ourselves. Paralysis may certainly be physical, but it may also be emotional and spiritual, personal, societal and congregational. In all truth, we the faithful are sometimes the paralyzed, stuck ones. And so, Dr. Daniels challenged us as individuals and as congregations to consider and discuss three questions:

What are you begging for?

Where are you stuck?

What do you expect God to do?

In whatever ways you and I are stuck and begging for help, we must first get un-stuck if we want to be relevant, enthusiastic, authentic, and loving. Being **REAL** will enable us to grow learners and followers of Jesus Christ. Being **REAL** will help us break down barriers and build bridges. Being **REAL** will lead us into the community to establish relationships and to act on behalf of those for whom Christ's heart breaks.

So, what if the church, this church looked more like this... **(video)**

This building, this place we call the United Methodist Church of Chagrin Falls is where we gather to worship, to study and grow in faith, to encourage one another, and to pray for one another and the world, but the mission field is beyond the walls of this church. Did you know that only about 17% of Americans go to a religious gathering on a weekend? Clearly, a majority of people in our own community view this church as irrelevant and unable to offer them anything. They do not see us as a place where healing and wholeness are found. What can we do about that?

The simple but possibly uncomfortable truth is that none of us are called to simply sit inside this lovely place with our friends. We are empowered by God's Spirit that we may be a **REAL** church that bears **REAL** fruit. We are called to be a catalyst for healing and wholeness in our community. We are called "to make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world." (Mission statement of the United Methodist Church). May it be so to the glory of God! Amen.