

“Making Lemonade”

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April 15, 2018

Acts 3:1-10

CHILDREN’S TIME

I have a lemon here. Do you like lemons? What can you do with a lemon?

Have you ever tried to eat a raw lemon that was just cut? It is pretty tart isn't it?

So, lemons are not really good for eating just as they are. They are just too tart, and a waste of time. Maybe we can just throw them away.

But we won't do that because we know that we can do other things with a lemon.

Let's make lemonade!

First, we cut the lemon. Then twist it into this glass thing-a-mado. Then we add a bit of sugar and a bit of water, mix it up, and we have lemonade! Do you want to try some?

Lemonade is awesome, especially when you have made it yourself fresh!

Lemons remind me that sometimes in life people don't feel that they have anything to offer the church or to God. People feel this way when they try something and it doesn't work out. Or, sometimes we don't feel good about ourselves when we compare ourselves to other people. That isn't such a good idea.

So, we are left sometimes thinking that we don't have anything good to offer.

If we believe that, we would be wrong.

Many years ago, right after Jesus rose from the dead and the Church was starting, two of Jesus' friends Peter and John met a man who couldn't walk and was begging for money. But they didn't have any money to give him.

Instead of just shrugging their shoulders and walking away, they stopped, and Peter healed the man's legs in Jesus' name. The man started jumping up and down praising God.

Peter realized that because God was with him, he had everything that he needed and that would be enough.

SERMON

You heard the children's time earlier, so finish the phrase for me, "When life gives you lemons, you ..." Right, "make lemonade!"

The phrase was initially coined by Christian anarchist writer Elbert Hubbard in a 1915 obituary he penned and published for dwarf actor Marshall Pinckney Wilder. The obituary, entitled "The King of Jesters," praises Wilder's optimistic attitude and achievements in the face of his disabilities. He wrote,

"He was a walking refutation of that dogmatic statement, Mens sana in corpore sano [A healthy mind in a healthy body]. His was a sound mind in an unsound body. He proved the eternal paradox of things. He cashed in on his disabilities. He picked up the lemons that Fate had sent him and started a lemonade-stand."

Although the expression was coined by Hubbard, many modern authors attribute the expression to Dale Carnegie who used it in his 1948 book "How to Stop Worrying and Start Living." Carnegie's version reads:

"If you have a lemon, make a lemonade."

Now perhaps you loves lemons and use them all the time in drinks and cooking. They might serve as wonderful center pieces on dinning room tables. But the whole context of this phrase comes from the idea that lemons are worthless, that you can't make anything with them.

It is from this understanding that cars were labelled as "lemons" when they have so many problems that you never see the end of them. You simply don't want a lemon!

READ ACTS 3:1-10

Jesus had called his disciples to go out into the world and carry within them the message of heaven on earth, the new way to be community, and the new way to be human, beginning right where they are and then branching out from there into all the world.

As they were going out, they were not just sharing about the gospel, but living as a new creation too. They were embodying the life of Jesus for the sake of world.

The law that was given through Moses and kept in the Ark of the Covenant used to be the center of the faith. Now that law was written in the hearts of the people. Each person carried with them what they needed.

In this story, Peter and John encountered a crippled man who was begging for money at one of the gates going into the Temple in Jerusalem. He had been doing this his whole life and people would routinely give him money.

Now Peter and John came along — notice their interaction with this man. First, they connect with him looking him in the eyes. It is so easy to look the other way, or simply to toss some money at someone begging, and not acknowledge his humanity. But no, Peter and John want to be related to this man. And Peter asked him to look back at them.

Some would say that the eyes are the access point to a person's soul. When you look into someone's eyes you see who they really are. Peter and John are not only interested in healing this person, but also beginning a relationship with him.

Peter told the man that he didn't have silver or gold. The request this man had been making his whole life and created the sustenance for his existence was something that Peter and John could not give.

But Peter said that what he did have he would give the man. And Peter healed him in Jesus' name. Then Peter lifted the man up and everyone celebrated. As new friends, all three of them went into the Temple to worship God together.

This is one of the new patterns in life for the early Church. It is a life of connection with other people — being related makes all the difference.

Let's hit pause on the story for a moment and think about our congregation here in Birmingham. We have dedicated significant energy and resources toward growing something new.

If we are going to follow the pattern of the early Church, we will look for ways to get related to people in the community. We'll start to get interested in those things that others in this community are interested in. We will find people in their space outside the sanctuary to get to know them and begin authentic connected relationships.

We have an amazing opportunity to do this during the summer right here in Birmingham on Wednesday evenings. Our church has become a sponsor for the concert series in

Shain Park. As a sponsor, we have a table at every concert.

We'll be planning what we might hand out at that table, but even more important than that, all of you have an opportunity to come down to the park, hang out, and get to know some new people. I hope that everyone in the congregation will sign up to be part of this.

As we hang out in the park, I invite all of you to follow Peter's example and look to be connected with people at more than a superficial level. I invite you to spend time getting to know new people, ask questions about what they are interested in — connect with them where they are in their lives.

The other day, we had an Intentional Restart Team meeting and Leona was sharing about another woman she just met and how a brief encounter turned into 45 minutes of talking about beans!

That isn't a metaphor, they literally spent 45 minutes talking about beans — something prior to the conversation Leona would have never said she had an interest — but she invested herself by jumping into the world of this other person.

By the end of 45 minutes, Leona knew a whole lot more about beans, and may have made a life-long friend.

I know that many of you have a great fear when it comes to getting out of your comfort zone. You have taken gift inventories and learned that “evangelism” is not in the wheelhouse of your giftedness. So, you have relegated those responsibilities to someone else.

I hate to put it this bluntly, but this is how congregations die. They shy away from what might be uncomfortable and say that it isn't their responsibility.

We have all kinds of reasons that we can't do things. We offer reasons based on the skills, gifts, and talents that we say we do not have. We say we are not outgoing. We say we don't have enough money, enough influence, enough connections. We say we don't have enough ability to do those things that are needed.

In the passage from Exodus that Bill read earlier, we only heard an excerpt. Moses gave one excuse after another for why he was not the right person for the job of delivering the Hebrews from slavery in Egypt.

There is a repeat phrase in that story. God says something and then ... “But Moses said...” There are a lot of “buts” in that story, lots of excuses that demonstrate limited thinking on the part of Moses.

First, Moses devalues his ability to contribute anything of value to God or others by saying “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh?”

How often have we lived in such a small world that we think the important things are best done by other people?

Next, Moses gave the excuse that if he goes to the Israelites, and they want to know God’s name, he wouldn’t know how to answer and they certainly would dismiss him. So, he can’t do it.

Then Moses threw up his hands and said that if he went to the Israelites they very well might simply flat out not believe that God really appeared to him. Then what?

God provided an answer to each of Moses’ excuses, so he pulled out the last one, which perhaps is the core of all his doubts. He said “But God, I have never been a good speaker and probably never will be, so and I just can’t do this!” And you

can hear a big ol’ whine at the end of his excuse.

Remember, this is Moses we are talking about here — later he was known as one of the greatest of all of the ancient prophets.

God tells Moses that he had everything he needed — God would fill in any gaps in the way only God could.

It was the same for Peter and John in the book of Acts. They could have complained that the man needed money and they didn’t have any, so therefore they couldn’t help the man.

Instead, they stepped out of the normal routine and trusted that what they had was enough. And then everyone, including God celebrated.

Are you willing to say yes, and do God’s work? Recognize the excuse that comes up, because they will. You know they will. They will be familiar and you will first think that they are real and a barrier. But they are not.

Are you willing to take that lemon that you were given and make it into lemonade? When you do, everyone will celebrate!