

## Acts 3.1-19 [ESV]

**3** Now Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, the ninth hour.<sup>2</sup> And a man lame from birth was being carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple that is called the Beautiful Gate to ask alms of those entering the temple.<sup>3</sup> Seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked to receive alms.<sup>4</sup> And Peter directed his gaze at him, as did John, and said, "Look at us."<sup>5</sup> And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them.<sup>6</sup> But Peter said, "I have no silver and gold, but what I do have I give to you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk!"<sup>7</sup> And he took him by the right hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong.<sup>8</sup> And leaping up, he stood and began to walk, and entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God.<sup>9</sup> And all the people saw him walking and praising God,<sup>10</sup> and recognized him as the one who sat at the Beautiful Gate of the temple, asking for alms. And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

### *Peter Speaks in Solomon's Portico*

<sup>11</sup> While he clung to Peter and John, all the people, utterly astounded, ran together to them in the portico called Solomon's.<sup>12</sup> And when Peter saw it he addressed the people: "Men of Israel, why do you wonder at this, or why do you stare at us, as though by our own power or piety we have made him walk?"<sup>13</sup> The God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, the God of our fathers, glorified his servant Jesus, whom you delivered over and denied in the presence of Pilate, when he had decided to release him.<sup>14</sup> But you denied the Holy and Righteous One, and asked for a murderer to be granted to you,<sup>15</sup> and you killed the Author of life, whom God raised from the dead. To this we are witnesses.<sup>16</sup> 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>17</sup> "And now, brothers, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did also your rulers.<sup>18</sup> But what God foretold by the mouth of all the prophets, that his Christ would suffer, he thus fulfilled.<sup>19</sup> Repent therefore, and turn back, that your sins may be blotted out,

Message

Breaking Cover for Jesus

## Intro

Some years ago I asked a man in this church a standard question: "How are you?" He gave me a response I have never forgotten. He smiled warmly and said: "All machines are running within expected parameters so I am happy." Some of you may remember Stephan who worked for Bosch developing variomatic transmission systems.

I thought that was a good expression of the typical human desire to live in the safe zone. While some of us might like a bit of excitement every now and then, most people typically want to live with regularity and predictability. In our social life we seem to need that. It's the sense of balance that assures us life is safe and all is OK.

The big term for this in social-systems is 'homeostasis'. This is when the relationships and social dynamics are all balanced and clear. It's a state of equilibrium where everyone has found and accepted their accepted place.

Some cultures are stronger on this than others. IMHO Dutch culture has a strong desire for avoiding risk and disturbance. Decisions are only made when everyone one agrees and it is strongly preferred that you act normally. In my perception '*normaal*' means you have two children, maybe three, live in a normal house with net curtains and two pot-plants on the front windowsill!

Personally I think '*doe normaal*' is highly overrated. Progress often comes when someone or some group break rank and do something, different or outside of the accepted norm.

"To improve the future we must disturb the present."

*William and Catherine Booth  
Late 19<sup>th</sup> century*

The founders of the Salvation Army, William and Catherine Booth understood this. They put it this way: "To improve the future we must disturb the present."

## Text

The story we heard today from Acts 3 reminds me of this. It is some time after Pentecost when Peter and John head off to do something natural and normal. They go to the Temple to pray at the appointed hour. At

the Temple entrance they meet a cripple asking for alms. People who worship God are meant to remember the poor so that is why we still meet the poor at cathedral doors today.

This is all normal. Peter and John could have sailed through and never thought of that moment again. They could have wandered in, dropping a coin or not dropping a coin and it would have made no difference. In the event they engaged this moment in a way that led to us hearing it read to us today 2000 years later in a language that did not exist at the time.

What happened?

In specific terms, the story tells us, they commanded the crippled man to look at them and in the name of Jesus told him to stand up and walk. They lifted him by the arms and he began to walk and to leap about praising God. People in the vicinity recognized who he was and made the connection.

And they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

This broken man had the use of his legs back and people wanted to know how and why.

This new fact on the ground gave Peter an opportunity to speak to the people there about Jesus in terms that they would have understood and appreciated.

**Q:** What did Peter and John do here that we might learn from today?

**A:** What I want to bring out is that Peter and John 'broke cover' from the normal and the ordinary that drew attention.

They did something that broke the parameter of what people expected people to do and say arousing interest.

It was their choice in that moment and it led to a series of consequences that gave glory to God and led people to faith in Jesus as their saviour.

To break cover they had to stick their necks out to upset or surprise the settled normal flow of how things typically happen. They gave people cause to think.

### Illustration / Testimony

About a week or so ago Arul told me about something that had recently happened in his life and I thought it provided an illustration of what breaking cover for God could look like in our circumstances.

### *-Testimony-*

Like all true stories there is much that can be heard here.

Firstly let's rejoice with Arul and Sheejah over God's faithfulness in guiding and providing for them.

What stood out for me was the way Arul was open about his faith during an uncertain process.

He was asked for a response to his pending dismissal and he answered with reference to his faith in God.

I hear that as an example of breaking cover. He could have just processed it within normal professional boundaries.

Instead he voiced his faith in God.

He said something about himself and what he believed.

That broke his cover as ordinary and of the world like everyone else. Arul was now outside the norm and was marked as a person of faith in uncertainty.

That action of breaking cover from being normal is what it takes to set in motion a personal witness.

But, But, What about ???

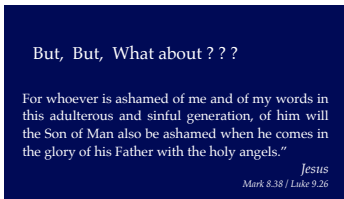
But, but what about?

The thought of breaking cover in any way may be an anxious one?

- What about separation of Church and State?
- What about offending people?
- What about secularization?

- What about the employment requirements?
- What about being 'uncool' or considered nutty by my friends?

I have a hard answer to all that and a soft answer.



The hard answer first comes from Jesus: [Mark 8.38 also Luke 9.26]

For whoever is ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of him will the Son of Man also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.”

I think that is very clear.

The soft answer to all those concerns in today’s terms is this: Nothing can stop you talking about yourself or acting in love as God leads you, no matter how out of the ordinary it may be.

I hope we can all discover the power of this.

The things to avoid are:

- Talking about others what how they live
- Being a moral policeman
- Linking faith and politics
- Claiming to be superior or better informed than others.

The thing to witness to when the moment presents is your faith in Jesus Christ. What that requires of you is breaking cover in a way that marks you as a believer in Jesus. God can then work.

An opportunity I often get is this:

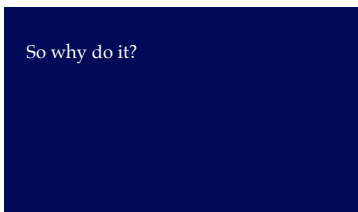
**Q:** People ask why I came to the Netherlands.

**A:** My standard answer is “I felt God call me here.” or “Call of God”.

The objective is to let people know we believe in God through Jesus Christ. This is life to us.

There is no way you can do that without making some form of wave or ripple. People may not like being disturbed or confronted like this. They may say something to indicate that.

Breaking cover may involve some form of social uncertainty or risk.



**Q:** So why do it?  
Indeed why do this when equilibrium could be threatened?  
Why risk awkwardness or worse?  
What would the best answer be?

**A:** My best answer is because Jesus told us to. It is his idea and his command. [Acts 1:8]

<sup>8</sup> But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.”

So why do it?

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That is what the story of Peter and John represents to me.

What they had to do was break cover so that the witness could happen.

Let's understand, It's when we step out that the power comes, not while we sit around thinking about it.

So long as we remain in the flow of the normal never allowing people a glimpse into our relationship with God through Jesus, there will not be a witness.

Confession: I have to admit to you that if you want experience the power of God, 10 minutes breaking cover and giving witness will reveal more than 10 days spent in Church on Sunday. The power of the Holy Spirit comes when we witness and not while we think about it.

Jesus did not send us out to be secret agents or undercover operatives.

We need to be bold enough to say something about ourselves that breaks the equilibrium and moves the situation forward beyond typical social lockdown. We cannot predict what will come of this. That's the exciting, if not scary part. But unless we disturb the present the future will be no different for the people in our lives than the present. Unless we break cover they may never have a chance to consider Christ and trusting in him.

A positive response to breaking cover like this is set out by St Peter in his subsequent instruction: [1 Peter 3,15-16]

1 Peter 3,15-16

<sup>15</sup> but in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, **always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect,** <sup>16</sup> having a good conscience, so that, when you are slandered, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

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In other words, someone might ask: 'Why do you trust Jesus or believe in God?'

What a great question! You need to have your answer ready for that. You might like to write it on a credit card sized piece of paper that lives in your purse or wallet?

## Conclusion

Can you see yourself doing this?

I hope so because I do not see any other way to reach and touch people with the love of God and the gospel today than through authentic personal witness.

Don't try to convert people, just dare to share a bit of your life with them, point to God and watch what comes of it. Like the parable of the sower, some seeds will fall and bear much lasting fruit.

Jesus told his disciples he would teach them to fish for people.

I suggest this is one way you can go fishing.

The thing is that fishing is not just a weekend activity for in church. Fishing is a way of life for fishers as is fishing for people.

Look for opportunities to put your line out by sharing your faith as opportunity presents.

Then follow through and enter the joy of fishing for Jesus.

## A Final Comment

At our first AGM meet last week there were questions about our church's planning and strategy. What I have been describing here is the out reach strategy of Jesus. It has a geographical progression flowing from Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria to the ends of the earth. It involves individuals being prepared to give witness, whether when summoned or as the moment presents. You don't need a budget for this. You don't need a plan. You do need a willingness to engage the people you have contact with when the moment presents.

That is what I am pleading for here.

Amen?