

Laity Sunday 2022: Preaching Resource
Rise Up and Testify to God's Grace!

Scripture: Acts 3:1-10

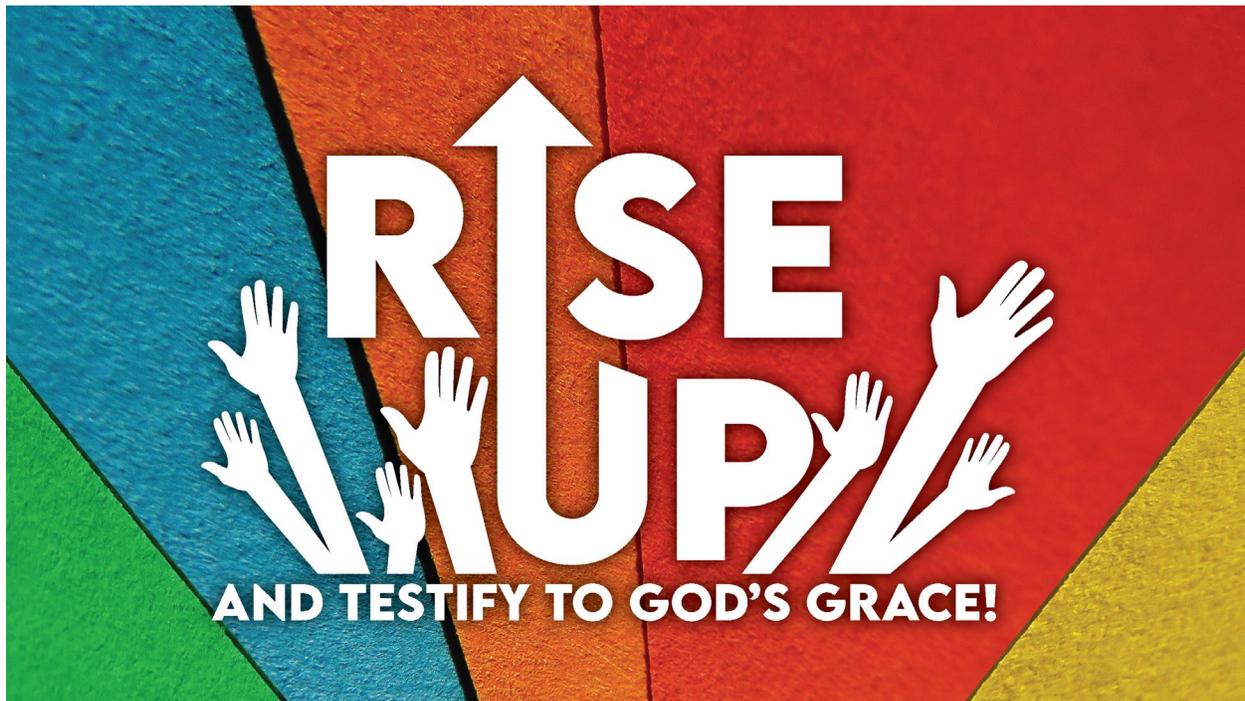
Focus Statement: Sometimes God's grace surprises us in ways we could not have imagined. We are called to actively respond – stand up! Then, we are called to live in gratitude and celebration, to be witnesses to the world of what God has done in our lives.

ME: Tell about a time when you faced a challenge, problem, or difficult circumstance and you were looking for a solution, but what you got was so much better or different than what you could have expected (e.g., you are unemployed and looking for a job and you come across an ad that seems like a long shot or unlikely but ends up being a huge blessing in your life). Or tell a story of a blessing in disguise, an unexpected blessing in the course of daily life.

WE: We all face different challenges in life and things that hold us back. For some of us, that might be a health challenge (physical, emotional, mental), job loss, broken relationships, etc. We often hope and pray for clear, practical solutions to our immediate problems. Sometimes, though, if we listen and pay attention for God's voice, we may find that God has something different or even greater in store. We may find that God's grace pulls us up to a new way of life that we did not even know was possible.

GOD:

Background information: Disability was understood differently in the Ancient Near East than it is today. Physical disabilities were associated with sin – whether of the disabled person or of their parents/ancestors. They not only affected people's abilities but also the way they were perceived and treated by their communities. They were typically pushed to the margins socially and economically. In this passage we can see that "the man lame from birth" was allowed to beg, but he was not treated as a full-fledged member of the community. He was literally left outside, at the gates. While physical healing is understood as grace in the context of this ancient understanding of disability, we must be cautious not



to imply that people with disabilities need to be “healed” or rid of their disabilities to be made whole or well.

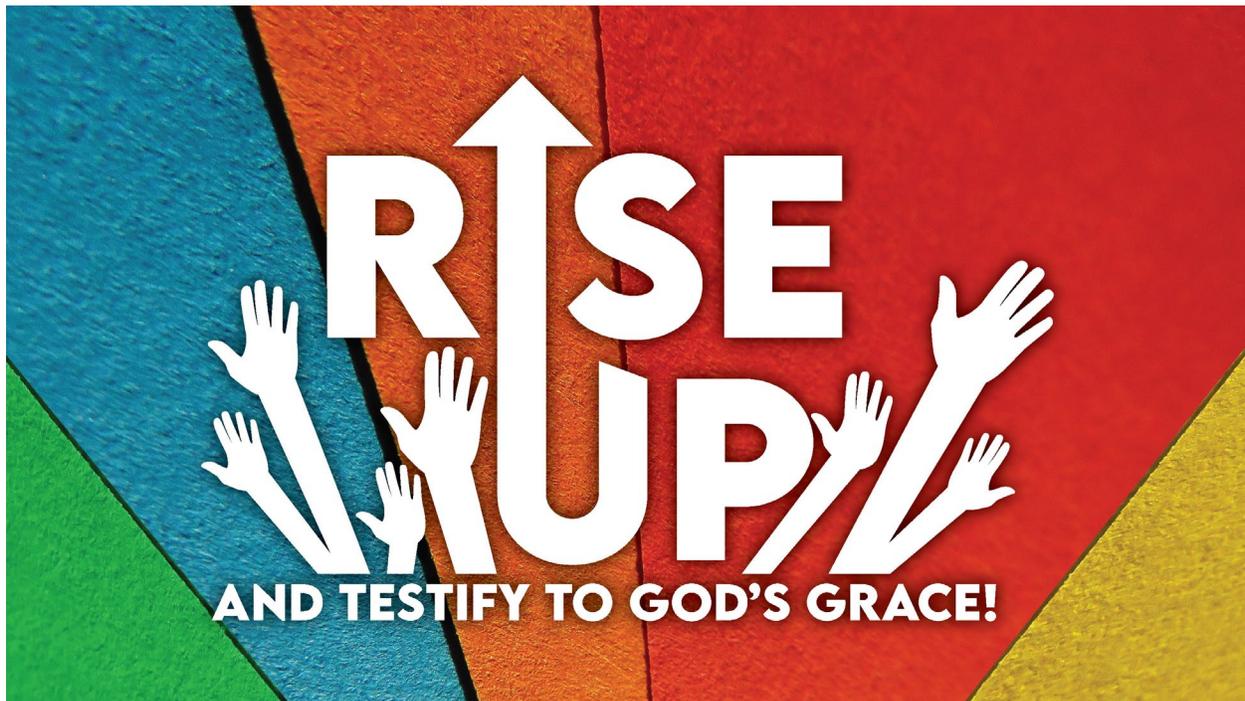
In this passage, we see a man who could not walk from birth going about his daily routine – being laid at the temple gate so he could beg for money. Getting money would help him to continue to live. It seemed like the most he could do to improve his situation.

When he asks Jesus’ disciples, Peter and John, for money, they say, “Look at us.” There is an invitation here to see and be seen by the disciples (the agents of grace in the story). The grace begins with being truly seen as a human being. The man’s response is one of expectation. He expects to receive something from them. His expectation can be seen as an expression of hope that God will provide. You might explore how living with hope and expectation is important for us to be open to God’s grace in our lives today.

Though “the man lame from birth” expected to receive something and *did* receive something, what he received was not what he expected. He hoped for what was realistic and practical but not for what he really needed. Yet the disciples met him and saw beyond his immediate request (for alms) to his true need for healing. If we are open to God’s grace, we, too, might be surprised at the unexpected ways God delivers. We might also see the alms here as a symbol for the world and the world’s answers to our problems. When Peter says, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you...,” Peter is giving the man the gift of God’s grace, which heals in a way worldly answers cannot.

The command to “stand up and walk” in Jesus’ name, must have been shocking to the man! To receive this shocking gift of grace, he had to respond in faith and actually stand up and walk. Notice the disciples take him by the hand and help him up – they do not leave him to figure it out on his own. We, too, are called to actively respond to the grace that is held out to us by Jesus. And we are called to help others up when they are in need of God’s grace.

The gift of grace is the life-altering gift of new life in Jesus. For this man, there is a clear before and after, a rebirth. On top of the physical healing, his relationship with the community was healed. He is no longer left outside at the temple, but “enters the temple with them...praising God,” (verse 8). Although



the Bible doesn't give us a follow up story, it seems likely that this moment of grace would have continued "ripple effects" in his life – perhaps allowing him to provide for himself or establish a family. When we respond to God's grace and when we are agents of God's grace in others' lives, we never fully know what kind of changes might take place.

The newly healed man recognized this amazing event as the work of God and responds by "walking and leaping and praising God." He did not just say "thanks, see you later," but rather through his response, becomes a witness to and living lesson about God's grace. His response of gratitude sparks "wonder and amazement" at what had happened to him, provoking curiosity about the power of Jesus to heal.

YOU: Where in your life are you experiencing challenges? Don't be afraid to ask for help and be open and receptive to the different forms it might come in. Like the man who showed up every day to ask for alms, persistence and hope are key. What might you need to do to respond to God's grace (or how are you being called to "stand up")? With God, everything is possible.

Where in your life have you received a blessing you didn't expect? Have you thanked God? Did you "walk and leap and praise God" – if not, it's not too late! What would it look like to practice gratitude and to "walk and leap and praise God" in response to this blessing?

Where in your life can you be like Peter and John? They were nonjudgmental and showed Christ's love and mercy. Pay attention for situations in your life where your first instinct is to judge or to walk by and instead, consider how you could show Christ's love.

WE: Imagine the kind of attention we would get if we were all leaping and praising God! People would want to know what we have and would want it for themselves. It may not be obvious to us in the moment, but when we genuinely live our lives as a response to God's grace, people notice. As a church, what are we doing to be aware of the challenges that people are having and the ways that we can show grace, extend a hand, and be the unexpected blessing to them? How is our church making a difference in our community?