Acts 3:12-19

**Third Sunday of Easter**

**April 18, 2020**

“Not as They Appear”

We know things are not always as they appear...but we forget this as we get busy with our lives. Black ice is an example of something which is not as it appears and is often quite dangerous. Things not being what they seem is what every mystery novel, movie or television series relies upon.

I ran across some amazing images in thinking about this notion that things are not always as they appear. Tell me what you think this is...



To me, this appears to be an image which has been double exposed with two subjects. It is very well done. It is also not a photograph but a painting.

This image looks a little more obvious doesn’t it?



It is a rug with a strong resemblance to a tiger.

Many of us don’t have a room big enough for such a rug. But you needn’t worry - no tigers were harmed in the making of this rug....however, over a half million cigarettes were.



Sometimes things which are not as they appear signal us to take a second look because they are out of place: Like this:



Or like this:



**It is hard for us to know when something is not what it appears when all the visual cues say it is.** Sometimes, things are not what they appear and turn out worse than we thought. Sometimes it is actually better than we imagined.We navigate life making decisions on the basis of how things appear - knowing full well that appearances can be deceiving.

In our text today from Acts we discover **with God** our expectations *have been too narrow or too low* and God surprises us by being more than we thought.

Peter and John were headed to the Temple to pray and worship, and they healed a crippled man. Our reading began with Peter taking a moment to correct the perception that somehow he and John are powerful healing magicians. It appears these two strangers from out of town have power beyond imagination - and so they are at pains to say, **“No, it isn’t us - really - he was healed in the name of Jesus.”** This is all Jesus. Which means we have reason to be *way more optimistic about the presence of God in our lives than we are*. **You never know when God will show up or who God will work through**. We imagine it has to follow some sort of formula...but God is full of surprises - good surprises.

And speaking of what God desires, the person who was healed - was excluded from the community of faith. **Good people thought he didn’t deserve any help**. But God did. Jesus’ practice of healing the sick and caring for those in need was consistent....and here in Acts his disciples are doing the same. We do well **to have the same sort of sensibilities** - not imagining those in need are there because they have displeased God but that ***their need calls forth God’s life from us.***

Our text today invites us to recognize **God’s ability to use really bad things in the service of life-giving opportunity.** Jesus was crucified. God among us was killed by us - divine love reached out to us and was rejected - these are not good things. But God used them for good. In God’s hands ***hateful crucifixion becomes redemptive resurrection***. Resurrection is what gives the power for living Christ-like lives - seeing with the eyes of Christ - having compassion with the heart of Christ - seeing beyond labels to the person - *especially the person who doesn’t even know what they need.*

Some of the most important things we discover are the things which are not as they appear***: Our limited abilities do not limit what God can do through us.***  Those who seem beyond assistance are not abandoned by God. And the amazing God we serve is alive and active in the world - using awful things in the service of new life. ***It turns out, things are not always as they appear: Thanks be to God.***