

## May 2, 2021 | Sanctuary Worship Service

TEXT: [Acts 4:5–10, 15–21](#)

TITLE: **No Good Deed Goes...**

By the Rev. Dr. Randy Bush

A man found a dog without a collar or tags wandering around his neighborhood along a busy street. He managed to get it out of traffic, put a spare collar on it, and began knocking on doors to see if it belonged to anyone. After about 10 houses, he gave up and took him home. That afternoon he made “Found Dog” fliers—about 100 of them—and put them up in the area. After a few days, he had resigned himself that he’d have to keep the dog when his phone rang. The caller gave a perfect description of the dog so he shared his address so the dog could be picked up. About an hour later, a woman showed up with the cops. She got out of the car and greeted him with “Are you the jerk who stole my dog?” Taken aback, the man said, “What? No! I found the dog and tried to find her home.” To which the woman angrily responded, “You stole the dog and I have witnesses.”

I’m going to pause this story for moment so I can draw some parallels with the story from Acts I just read. In Acts 3, Peter and John were going to the temple to pray when they saw a lame man lying nearby. Peter then says this beautiful statement: *Silver and gold have I none, but what I have I give you: in the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk.* Extending a hand to him, the lame man was able to stand and was healed. When news of this miraculous good deed got out, Peter and John end up not being praised, but arrested, interrogated, and basically accused of blasphemy. It’s so ironic! A lame man is healed, but the healers are arrested. Peter’s reply to his accusers builds on this irony. He says to them, “If you can’t recognize something that is good, you yourselves must be evil. For I proclaim the crucified Jesus who is the resurrected Lord. The stone many rejected is actually the cornerstone of God’s kingdom.” That Acts story even ends with another piece of irony—for Peter’s accusers tell him that they’ll release him if he keeps his mouth shut about this resurrected Christ, but Peter tells them that is impossible. That good news is too wonderful to be kept hidden. He has no choice but to share it with the world.

Now back to the maligned good-deed-doer who found a missing dog. The woman tried to get the officer to arrest the man, but after hearing both sides of the story, the cop quietly turned to the woman and said, “So, he stole your dog, asked all your neighbors who the dog belonged to, put up signs saying he had the dog, and then invited you over to take the dog back? Either he’s the worst criminal in the world or you don’t understand the definition of “stole”, ma’am.” The woman then claimed he’d stolen the dog for the reward money. The officer said he didn’t see any offer for a reward nor had the man asked for one. But out of curiosity, how much were you going to offer? The woman said “\$200! That’s why he took my dog.” The officer then said, “Well, there’s no evidence of him stealing the dog, but it seems to me that he’s earned the reward money.” End of story.

We're always told to be nice, to help others, to do good deeds. Yet not every good deed story has a happy ending. Sometimes doing good leads to trouble. Peter's act of compassionate healing set in motion a chain reaction of resistance and opposition. It led to him being arrested, tried, and threatened. It's enough to make you wonder whether or not doing good is actually worth it.

But think about it for a moment. Why are good deeds necessary in the first place? A good deed is necessary because something else, something bad or wrong or unjust, has diminished another person and a good deed is how this harm is corrected. The lame man outside the temple was largely ignored by society; people avoided him, walked past him, maybe tossed a coin onto his blanket but did nothing to truly help him. Peter's good deed challenged the status quo of injustice and neglect, even as it started a chain reaction stirring up those who benefit from the status quo being unchallenged. In this case the religious leaders didn't want someone else manifesting power and authority in the name of God right outside their temple! Coming to modern times, an unholy profiteering from slavery and human trafficking treated African Americans then and vulnerable women and children now as commodities for someone else's gain. The good deeds of abolition and anti-trafficking laws send ripples of disruption through a society built around bias. You can only counter what is entrenched and bad if you're willing to do something good yet disruptive. It's like the rallying cry of the late Representative John Lewis, who called us to get into some "good trouble."

That's why it is important to do good deeds - to do something to correct what is wrong, to help someone else, to step out and to speak up. The poet Khalil Gibran said, *The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the greatest intention*. We might think to ourselves, yes, it would be nice if this were to happen—if this was how all people were treated. But those thoughts are just abstract intentions. Add them up together and they're not enough to tip the scale of justice in the slightest. However, real goodness is never an abstraction. It is always concrete. It has substance; it is tangible, acted upon, made real. And even the smallest of such deeds moves the needle and tips the scale toward God's beloved community.

Peter and John healed the lame man, who then clung to them and prompted a crowd to gather around them, calling them miracle-workers. Peter used that moment to tell the story of Jesus, the Messiah who had been crucified yet raised from the dead. The chain reaction of this good trouble was that Peter was briefly arrested, yet many more believed in Christ—by some estimates 5000 people. Peter was willing to do a good deed right where God had placed him. Peter was willing to speak of hope and light and new life in Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to the crowd that gathered around him. He didn't have to travel far. He simply did something good right where God had planted him. And what was true for Peter is true for us. Right where you are—in your neighborhood, in your city, in your family or circle of friends; along the path you walk each day, you can do a good deed that matters. That heals a hurting world. That speaks of resurrection hope.

Today's sermon's title was left unfinished: *No good deed goes...* The common, cynical way to finish that phrase is to say, "No good deed goes unpunished." The story of Peter and John seems to verify that perspective. They heal a lame man in the name of Jesus Christ and are arrested for their good deed. But the idea that you are punished for good deeds implies you'll regret your acts of mercy and kindness later, that this world is more darkness than light. I don't believe that to be true. Another option is to say, *No good deed goes unnoticed*. That is more hopeful, but it still implies that we are doing what is right in order to draw attention to ourselves—sort of a moral *quid pro quo* with the universe. I do something good today; you grant me a blessing tomorrow. And thus if we aren't acknowledged, if we don't get awards and recognitions and praise from friend and stranger alike, well, then perhaps it's just not worth it to do those good deeds in the first place. So that's not a faithful answer either.

Perhaps the best conclusion to the phrase comes from an old Aesop fable – the story of the lion and the mouse. A bored lion sat beneath the shade of a tree when a mouse scurried by. He moved his big paw and pinned the mouse down, simply because he could; but the mouse squeaked, "Please, let me go and someday I'll return the favor." Laughing at this unlikely offer, the lion let the mouse go free. Months later, the lion lay tangled beneath a hunter's net, caught in the ropes without hope of escape. The tiny mouse saw his plight and managed to chew through the ropes in the net so that the lion could go free. The mouse did return the favor—and the moral of the story is: *No good deed is ever wasted*.

To do what is right and good means to act, as opposed to ignoring what is wrong or only offering an intention without concrete follow-through. To do what is right and good means to see what others overlook or avoid, and to trust that God has placed you in a spot where you can make a difference. To do what is right and good means you are open to the leading of the Holy Spirit, who gives us words to say—naming the irony when people of power want to use their authority to harm rather than heal; or telling the story of Christ, how a rejected stone became the keystone in the arch of justice, and how resurrection light chases away every shadow of fear and selfishness. Christ the Good Shepherd still calls us to follow him and to do what is good. His good deed long ago appeared to reap a terrible punishment—an arrest, a degrading trial, a painful crucifixion. But far from being wasted, that good deed changed the world and now redeems and reorients each of our lives.

So choose this day whom you will serve—which story of light vs. darkness, justice vs. sin, you will tell by your words and actions. Like Peter, go now knowing that we cannot keep silent about what we have seen and heard in Christ Jesus, and trust that by God's grace and providence, no good deed is ever, ever wasted.

AMEN