

Sermon for: Trinity Lutheran Church, Manila
4th Week After Easter—April 20, 2024

Sermon Text: Acts 3:1-13 (First Lesson)
Sermon Title/Theme: “The BOLD Easter Church”

Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. The first lessons for the Easter season continue from the book of Acts. Following the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit, Peter and John are taking their resurrection witness to the streets of Jerusalem. There, the miraculous healing of the lame beggar causes all sorts of questions and challenges to the two apostles. In Acts, chapter 4, they find themselves arrested and “on trial” for their proclamation *“Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well . . . There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given among men by which we must be saved,”* vs.10, 12).

Inspired historian Luke then notes the response of the crowd, *“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus,”* vs. 13.

The Easter church and Easter people are BOLD in their witness of Jesus.

The Christian young man went to work at one of the local production plants known for the casual use of profanity and for the frequent after-work parties. After a few weeks one of his friends asked him how it was going in that kind of company. “On, fine,” he said, “they don’t know yet that I’m a Christian.” Sadly many of us can probably identify with the young man. We’ve been at work and at play and we’ve managed to keep our

Christianity a secret. We confess that we often aren't very bold with our witness whether it is words or actions.

For 40 days after His resurrection Jesus showed Himself to be alive. He made appearances to Mary Magdalene; the disciples on the road to Emmaus; the disciples in the Upper Room, the disciples gathered on the seashore. He showed them His scarred hands and feet; He ate with them.

Filled with the power of the Pentecost Spirit the disciples couldn't help but share the message of the resurrection. Peter and John boldly clarified that it was not by their own power that the healing miracle took place. "It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed."

What a difference Jesus' resurrection and the power of the Spirit made. Now bold preacher Peter had also been the one who was too fearful to confess his association with Jesus. To the discipleship question of a slave girl outside the court of Caiaphas, Peter had responded, "I don't know the man." Now he is saying "I not only know the man, I am a witness of His resurrection." Peter was willing to be imprisoned and worse for Jesus.

What had happened? Luke explains for us that it was not any physical or academic change. It wasn't a change in their looks. "*They realized that they were uneducated common men.*" They had been just fishermen. They had not been in the company of learned rabbi's. There's was not some sort of Hollywood make-over. The explanation is "*these men had been with Jesus.*"

They had been with Jesus during His earthly ministry listening to His words and watching His miracles. They had been with Jesus on the Mount of Transfiguration. They

had been with Jesus witnessing the tragedy of the passion and the agony of the crucifixion. But most of all they had been to the empty tomb on an Easter Sunday morning. When they had huddled in fear on Easter eve and the days following, they had been with Jesus who had offered His peace and His presence. They knew that He was alive. Filled with the Spirit, they were going to tell the world, no matter what the price tags were, no matter what the consequences were, that Jesus was alive. The number may vary with the translation but I noted at least seven times in the book of Acts where the boldness of the Apostles is noted. Immediately after the conversion of Saul in Acts 9 it is noted of him *“He had seen the Lord; he had spoken to him; and he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.”* (vs. 27). People who have seen the resurrected Jesus and believe in Him boldly confess Him. There had been other bold witnesses: Noah willing to start building an ark in the middle of the desert; Moses willing to stand before the powerful Egyptian Pharaoh and ask for release of the Israelites; a shepherd boy, David, who boldly battled a giant; Daniel willing to face lions rather than worship at idol; Elijah boldly claiming that the true God could ignite a water soaked sacrifice. Those bold actions and proclamations were prophetic of the Apostles’ bold witnesses for the One who had overcome death and the grave.

The text notes that the disciples were *“uneducated common men.”* A resurrection proclamation does not require a certain education level, professional training, or other particular skills. The requirement is *“to be with Jesus.”* We too have been with the risen Jesus these weeks of the Easter season. Through the witness of Scripture we have been with Peter, John, Paul, and the other Apostles to see the physically resurrected Jesus.

We have been with Jesus as He has welcomed us to His Table to feast on His body and blood. To be with Jesus is to be blessed with a faith in His resurrection.

This past week it was noted that following his Masters' golf championship last weekend, Scotty Scheffler immediately made a very clear and public statement of his Christian faith. Occasionally we hear the bold witness from a professional athlete or other public personality. In our post-Christian culture such statements are rare, and they are often criticized (or even deleted) by the media. It is not culturally "cool" to be bold for Jesus. So fellow believers blessed to have been with Jesus, how bold are you in your witness?

Many of us have made the confirmation vow to "continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all even death, rather than fall away from it" and then later we wouldn't stand up for the truth or to the temptation, and we were cowards rather than witnesses.

I must confess that there have been many times in my life where I've been the person in the opening illustration hesitant to let the light of Christianity shine. Working at the grain elevator in rural Kansas in my late teens and early twenties, I could curse with the best of them. How many times in the social setting haven't we gossiped along with everybody else? Whether we're a 16 year old high school student or a "mature" adult we've given into the peer pressure. Nobody knew we'd been with Jesus. Perhaps as parents we've been embarrassed when our children prayed too loudly in the restaurant. We don't want anybody to know that we've been with Jesus.

Praise God that the resurrected Lord has been to the cross where He suffered and died for all of our sins. Praise God that the one who welcomed back a cowardly Peter welcomes us back. Praise God that we can take all our spiritual timidity included it in our

confession of our sins of commission and omission and leave it with Jesus. Through the sacrifice of Jesus we receive forgiveness of all of our sins. Praise God that He sends His Spirit to renew us and refresh us that we might also be bold for His sake.

We probably won't end up on the streets of Jerusalem (Manilla or Manning) having to defend our witness. But God may have other audiences in mind for us.

Perhaps we start by being bold with our family. Do our children or grandchildren know that we've been with Jesus? Do we model Christ in our conversations? Do we demonstrate family priorities that show the things of God are important?

Perhaps we start by being bold in our church. Not everything that happens in churches is always done in the Spirit of the resurrection. Not every witness is about a Jesus who is alive and present. Maybe we need to be bold with each other in living out our priorities as a church. Perhaps we start by being bold in our school hallways or our places of work. Can we be the one who in the name of Jesus defends the reputation of the person being gossiped about or bullied? Can we be the one to say "I can't make that activity because I'll be at church that day?"

God in His grace and power gives us times and places to be bold. Maybe for some of you it's a bold decision to make a significant mission or ministry contribution. Maybe it's a bold decision to stand up for the cause of the rights of the unborn or the handicapped. Whatever the context of our boldness it's not about a human cause or passion. What make us different is not that we're just bold, but we're bold with the message of the resurrected Lord. As others see and hear us, may it also be noted,

"They were astonished and they took note that these men and women had been with Jesus." God grant it for Jesus' sake. Amen.