

Awakening to Boldness

A sermon in the Easter-Pentecost series “Spring Awakenings”

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- Acts 3:1-12; Acts 4 (selected verses) ²⁹“And now, Lord, take notice of the threats they have made, and allow us, your servants, to speak your message with all boldness. ³⁰Reach out your hand to heal, and grant that wonders and miracles may be performed through the name of your holy Servant Jesus.”
- Romans 13:11b The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed.
- Sermon-in-a-sentence: Knowing Jesus emboldens us to represent his character and nature in daily life.

I’ll be the first to admit that today’s sermon title – “Awakening to Boldness” – sounds like the tag line from an ad for Folgers Coffee or Starbucks. But this is the second installment of our “Spring Awakening” series based on the encouragement St. Paul offered in Romans 13:11 “to wake up from your slumber....”

Last week, on Easter morning we considered how Jesus’ resurrection is an opportunity for us to awaken to “second chances.” God’s gift of forgiveness gives us a “second chance” by wiping clean the slate filled with our failings and misdeeds. What does one do next? Well, let’s consider how the disciples themselves followed up on their second chances after Easter.

From Acts Chapter 3 we heard how Peter and John responded to a beggar’s appeal for money by giving him the gift of a miraculous healing. Peter had said, “I have no money at all, but I give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth I order you to get up and walk!” Immediately functionality returned to man’s joints and limbs. As he walked under his own power into the Temple with the two disciples, others there recognized him as the man who had been carried to his begging post every day for the past forty years.¹ The Bible says that Peter and John taught the crowd more about Jesus, and that “many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five-thousand.”²

Of course, it was the religious and civic leaders of Jerusalem who had pushed to have Jesus executed. They eliminated Jesus (so they thought!) because they feared that his calls for spiritual reform would cause them trouble. The increasing popularity of Jesus and his message could have disrupted the comfortable and even profitable situation the Council members enjoyed because of their positions and connections.

Those same religious and civic leaders of the Temple Council also were suspicious of any *followers* of Jesus who might remain, even though the Council didn’t know for sure who those followers might be. We have to remember that Jesus didn’t maintain a membership directory of followers; he didn’t publish a “cast list” of his apostles complete with photos and brief bios. If you were a member of the Temple Council it was unlikely you’d have remembered who Jesus’ apostles were or what they looked like unless you’d seen them with Jesus on numerous occasions... which the Council had not. So when the Temple Council interrogated two men arrested for unauthorized preaching at the Jerusalem Temple, Acts 4:13 says that it took the members of the Council awhile before they realized that these men named Peter and John had been followers of Jesus.

What gave it away to the Council?

- First, no one recognized the two – they were strangers in Jerusalem.

¹ cf. Acts 3:2, 4:22

² Acts 4:4 NRSV

- Second, their Galilean dialects quickly confirmed to the Council that Peter and John were not from Jerusalem and thus had not undergone training in the laws and traditions—training that was customary for the Temple elite.
- Third, Peter and John spoke about Jesus with understanding, with passion—what the Bible calls “boldness.” Members of the Council were struck by—and worried by—the articulate persuasiveness of these men.

After having the two led away, the Council discussed what might happen if these Jesus-followers kept exciting the crowds with their talk. They decided to release the two, but not before issuing them a strong warning to stop speaking in the name of Jesus.³

What does it mean, to speak or pray “in the name of” Jesus?

We can get a grasp on the meaning of “name” if we note that in ancient thought the proper name of a person expressed that person’s essence. By uttering that person’s name, one had that person’s power present. We glimpse some of the power of “the name” when we recall some of our common expressions: “It’s not what you know, but who you know” or “Just mention my name, and they’ll give you red-carpet treatment.”⁴

By the undeserved grace of God, in faith we live our lives in the power of the name of Jesus. When we speak or act “in the name of Jesus” we stand for him in that moment. We represent Jesus. We embody Jesus. We embody his obedience to God’s will. His values are proclaimed through us: values of acceptance, mercy, forgiveness, respect, inclusion, devotion, love. Because we know Jesus, because we know his nature and character, we are given access to the power of his name. The power of the name of Jesus emboldens us. We are given boldness to think and to speak and to act in ways that honor the will of God.

- In the name of Jesus we seek truth rather than what merely sounds appealing.
- In the name of Jesus we seek what’s right rather than what’s expedient.
- In the name of Jesus we seek what is wholesome, not hollow;
 - --what is generous, not greedy;
 - --what is loyal, not back-stabbing;
 - --constructive, not destructive;
 - --forgiving, not resentful;
 - --collaborative versus self-serving;
 - --enduring versus fleeting.

The Book of Acts calls us to awaken to our power to influence the world. This power is ours because the name of Jesus gives us boldness to stand for him in our daily lives. Let’s be clear:

- boldness does not require rudeness;
- boldness does not imply loudness;
- boldness doesn’t depend on our ability to find the “perfect” way to say something;
- nor does boldness imply that we’ll dominate every conversation by talking and talking until we wear people out.

Still, because we know Jesus—his character, his values, his faithfulness—we are emboldened to speak and to act in the power of his name. We are emboldened by Christ so that our words and actions will bring “good news of great joy for all the people.”⁵

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³ Acts 4:17, 21 GNB

⁴ Robert J. Karris, O.F.M. Invitation to Acts: a commentary on the Acts of the Apostles with complete text from The Jerusalem Bible. Garden City, N.Y.: Image Books, 1978, 49

⁵ Luke 2:10b NRSV