

TEXT: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John....they wondered. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus".

(Acts 4: 13)

INTRODUCTION That's a beautiful line...a powerful text for a sermon. I've been carrying it around with me now for several months...since bumping into it last Fall in our Tuesday morning Bible study group. The "boldness" of Peter and John. Let's think about it together for a few moments this morning and see if there's a message in it for us.

DEVELOPMENT Now, as I read this fourth chapter of the Book of Acts, I'm aware that Peter and John had done a good deed. They had helped to heal a crippled man and now they were having to explain what had taken place to the authorities. (Acts 4: 5 - 12) They were quite open in offering an explanation and saying this was done in the name of Jesus Christ.

There were two things that the authorities could not get away from as they confronted the boldness of these two men. As we review the narrative, the account...

First, there was the undeniable influence of Jesus Christ at work in their lives. They were men of no extraordinary power and had little in the way of education and prestige going for them. Yet, they were bold to speak and as they spoke it became clear that their power came from Jesus. Yes, they had been with Him and had caught something of His own faith. They shared in His courage and through them His love and power was now spreading into the circles of wretched humanity.

The authorities and the observers that day could not get away from the fact that those men were carrying on the work of Him who they thought was dead and buried.

And second, neither could they get away from the undeniable evidence. There was the lame man standing in front of them...now healed. His life had been changed. They were not dealing with a theory which could be abstractly denied, nor with a proposition or claim that could be conquered by a battle of wits of verbal exchange.

They were dealing with a deed, with something that had been done. They could not get around it. They could not even suggest that it was bad. The undeniable evidence of religion is always like that. It is a life that has been changed, a fearful person who has been given confidence, a lost soul that has been found, rescued from destruction. It is something done in the community, a school built, a hospital endowed, a home for children established, a refugee family helped to a new life.

Those are the things that no one can deny. As they say, "they're the proof of the pudding". Undeniable evidence. There it was in front of them.

A LAST RESORT Now it's interesting to note that in the face of such facts that the authorities were driven to a last resort. When they recognized that "they had been with Jesus", they then forbade the men to talk

about Jesus. They forbade the men to even mention His name. Verse 18 of the fourth chapter puts it this way, "So they called them and charged them not to speak or to teach in the name of Jesus". They might as well have commanded the tides of the sea to stand still. They refused to not speak...for

In verse 20 we read, "For we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard."

The compulsion to preach is the first prerequisite of good preaching. A man talks about the weather because he has nothing else to talk about. He talks about Jesus because nothing else is worth talking about. And that kind of compulsion comes only to those who have felt the power of Christ at first hand. Like men released from prison after all hope had disappeared, they cannot refrain from telling others about it...especially others who themselves are imprisoned by life's experiences.

Follow it along another step or two. When the men went back to their friends they burst out in a hymn of praise and thanksgiving, ending with the petition that they be given the power, not to keep still, but rather to speak out with even greater boldness than before. And their prayers were answered. The whole building seemed to shake, as if a power too great to be contained had been unleashed...and was shaking itself loose. And the men went out and spoke the word of God with boldness.

In verse 29 and again in verse 31 we find the word "boldness". A powerful word, a word that carries with it the suggestion of fearlessness and daring. And something that we need to have more of in our time and in our lives.

BRINGING IT HOME All right then...in taking this word out of the First Century and bringing it down to the 20th century, to our time and our lives, let me quickly touch on several places where we need to "dare to be bold".

Remembering that the boldness of Peter and John was due to "having been with Jesus", and they were filled up with the Holy Spirit, we need to get over some of our timidity when it comes to letting others know how we feel about our faith in Christ to accomplish things. You know how it is. We tend to feel uncomfortable when it comes to talking about Jesus to others...letting them know what His word and way really means to us. We're doing better in telling each other how we feel, but how are we away from the Church...on the road, so to speak, when we play an "away game". That's always tougher. In Christianity these days, you've got to be able to win both at home and away...just as in sports. If you can't do both, you're in trouble.

Four weeks from today we'll be celebrating another of our "Each One Bring One" Sundays. This is a step in the right direction...a simple exercise when we ask you to "dare to be bold"...to speak the Word to a friend...the word about Christ and Church...to invite them to come along with you. It's an opportunity to go "one on one" with a friend. Have some fun with it and see how you do. Choose one person (or more) in the next few weeks...to concentrate on...to talk to them...to invite them to come along with you. Between now and next Sunday, pick out some person in your circle of friends. That's the first step. Between next Sunday and the Sunday after, share the word. Remember the boldness of Peter and John in speaking out. They did it. Why can't we?

I have the feeling that if each of us were to respond with eagerness, with faith, with enthusiasm to this simple spiritual exercise or challenge... that this building might seem to shake, "as if a power too great to be contained was shaking itself loose".

I made the comment in my report at the charge conference last Sunday afternoon that "you can't steer a parked car". And that "even God can't steer a parked Christian". Some of you have been parked too long. Time's running out. The meter has been showing red for some time. I'd like to encourage you to move out on your best hunch. Dare to be bold. Once a person is in motion God then has something to work on. There's no point to sitting in front of the wheel, keys in hand, debating the course of the journey. Yes, even God can't steer a parked Christian. Remember the lepers referred to in Luke 17 of whom it is written...."as they went they were healed".

BOLDNESS IS INDIVIDUAL

The last thought I share with you is this: through our boldness we really can help each other. Boldness is individual. Peter and John through their boldness helped to enlarge the sense of the possible for others. So often we feel the limits of the possible and then someone speaks with boldness - the lifting and helping word and we believe it can be done. We move out in faith and it is done. Boldness enlarges the sense of the possible. It helps us to move out and tackle the implissible.

Representative Jack Kemp recently sent President Reagan a memo noting the following. Before Gen. Douglas MacArthur's masterstroke, the landing at Inchon, Mac Arthur's advisers and emissaries sent from Washington, said it could not be done. The harbor, the weather, the ships, the tides - everything was wrong. Recalling Mac Arthur's peroration that carried the crucial meeting, a witness said:

"If MacArthur had gone on the stage, you would never have heard of John Barrymore".

saying why it could not be done,

After all the skeptics spoke, MacArthur rose. In his memoirs he wrote,

"I could almost hear my father's voice telling me as he had so many years before, 'Doug, councils of war breed timidity and defeatism.'

All councils do. There never was a bold committee. Boldness is individual.

For us it comes from our "being with Jesus"....from our relationship with Him, one that is undergirded by prayer and Bible study, and yes from the "taking of the cup and the breaking of the bread". "Dare to be bold". This week try enlarging the sense of the possible for some one else by being bold enough to speak His word of life and of love....so that others may be lifted...helped, healed.

PRAYER

Lord, we believe. Help thou our unbelief. Strengthen, steady us and sustain us. Empower us with Your Sprit that we may be empowered to speak Your lifting Word to others with greater boldness....

May we like Peter and John help and heal others in our daily rounds. And as we grow in our faith in Him in whom we see life's highest hopes and life's deepest meaning, may we feel not only this room shaking, but the world which is our home. In the spirit of Christ, the world shaker, we pray. Amen

ANNOUNCEMENTS: March 1, 1981

HOLY COMMUNION It is the custom of this Church to celebrate the Sacrament of Holy Communion on the first Sunday of each month. We do like to announce - especially for the benefit of visiting friends - that the Lord's Table in this Church is open to all. One does not have to be a member of this parish nor of this denomination to receive the Sacrament. His Table, we feel, is open to all and we would invite and encourage all of you to receive the Sacrament this morning, on this Sunday before we enter into Lent.

It will be served to you in the pews. We ask that upon receiving the elements that you hold them until all have been served and then together - as one family of Faith - we shall commune. May this be for you an occasion of spiritual renewal and rededication of your life to the will of God expressed and revealed to us in the life and love of Jesus Christ.

VISITORS We welcome the visitors in the congregation today...pleased to have you worshipping with us. We hope that the opportunity will be ours to greet you personally either at the door or downstairs in the Russell Room where tea and coffee will be served.

Be free in the sharing of your name with us. Sign one of the visitors cards in the pews or one of the Guest Books in the narthex. Join us on other Sundays in our worship. You worship in a church that has been ministering to the needs of others in the name of Christ since 1837. It is in His name - in the name of Jesus Christ - that we bid you welcome this morning.

CONCERNS We have a number of concerns to which we would like to bring your attention.

First, be sure to pick up a copy of the March issue of "A Word In Edgeways" following the service. Copies are by the door as well as downstairs in the Russell Room. It's our monthly parish news sheet and it describes all that is going on.

Second, Ash Wednesday is this coming Wednesday and it marks the beginning of Lent. Note that Holy Communion will be served in the morning from 7:30 to 9:30 and in the evening from 4:30 to 6:30....here in the sanctuary at the altar rail. Come by yourself or with one or two others. Also, copies of the devotional booklet, The Sanctuary are available in the narthex today. Take one along with you and use it each day during Lent.

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PLEASE NOTE

Please note that the Adult Fellowship has an interesting outing for today....following the coffee hour...a brunch and a trip to a Wine Cellar in the Lower East Side. Mary Pat Englehart and David Kilbride are the new co-coordinators of Adult Fellowship Activity and will be at the coffee hour to answer questions....also to hand out the program flyers for the coming weeks. Mary Pat Englehart. David Kilbride.

Note that the newly elected Membership Committee has a supper meeting scheduled for this evening at 6:30 in the Russell Room. Beverly Limestall and Frank High - the new co-chairmen of the Membership Committee are hopeful of a good turnout for this first meeting of the Committee. Tonight at 6:30.

A Pot-Luck Supper is "in the works" for next Sunday evening...with the emphasis on a "Celebration of Youth". Our Youth Choir will be singing and also a free will offering to help defray the costs of the new choir robes will be taken. That's next Sunday evening and a flyer is being circulated today with that.

SPECIAL OFFERING

Throughout Methodism today a special offering for the Human Relations Day emphasis is being received. We usually respond with about \$200 to this appeal...a dollar or two from each of us either today or next Sunday will make it possible for us to do so again this year. The cause is worthy. We hope you'll respond either this morning or next Sunday morning.

ONE LAST WORD

One last word...there's a lot going on in the Church in the month of March. Our thanks to those who worked on yesterday's rummage sale which was quite successful. Proceeds go to our Summer Church Camp Fund for our own boys and girls and over \$570. was made.

OFFERING

Jesus said, "It is more blessed to give than to receive". In this spirit let us worship God with our morning offering.