

April 22, 2018
Good Shepard Sunday

Sermons

from The Church of the Covenant

“The Audacity of Love”

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Acts 4:5-12

While Peter and John were speaking to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came to them, much annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. So they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.

The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, 'By what power or by what name did you do this?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead.

This Jesus is "The stone that was rejected by you, the builders; It has become the cornerstone."

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'

*This is the word of the Lord
Thanks be to God*

The Audacity of Love

“There can be no success without audacity. Audacity is the boldness to take risks, to appear foolish, even to fail in the hopes of achieving something truly tremendous.” - Unknown

“And they’ll know we are Christians by our love, by our love

Yes they’ll know we are Christians by our love.”

This week, Mark In the movie *Pay it Forward*, a twelve-year-old boy named Trevor receives an intriguing homework assignment from his social studies teacher. The assignment: think of something to change the world and put it into action. On his way home from school later that day, Trevor notices a homeless man, Jerry and decides to make a difference in Jerry's life by giving him food and offering him a place to stay in his home. Out of this encounter, Trevor comes up with an idea for his class project: repaying good deeds not by returning a favor, but by doing new good deeds to three new people. The catch is, these good deeds have to be something big – something the person you are helping could never do for themselves on their own. Nobody thinks it's going to work. His friends at school say he's dreaming, and his plan is stupid. Trevor's efforts to make good on his idea bring about a revolution in his life, his family, and his school – and the revolution doesn't stop there. The project goes on to have a life-changing impact on an ever-widening circle of people, thousands of people, in other communities, across the country, people that Trevor never even knew.

At the end of the film, Trevor is being interviewed by a television journalist whose life has also been touched by the *Pay it Forward* project.

He asks Trevor what made him think that a twelve-year-old kid could make any kind of difference in the world at all, and if he was proud of what he'd done in creating this nationwide movement. Trevor replied that, no, he wasn't proud. What he'd done wasn't really such a big deal: “I saw someone who needed help – and I wanted to help them.”

Trevor has a lot in common with the Apostle Peter in today's scripture. Both had been inspired by teachers with radical ideas about how the world ought to be, and about who should make it that way. Neither Trevor nor Peter was the type of person you'd think could make much of a difference. Trevor, a twelve-year-old boy from a troubled home; Peter, a poor, uneducated fisherman from a

tiny town in the middle of nowhere and yet they both had the audacity to see the needs of this world, to hear the voices of those who cried out for help, and dare to do something about them.

Who on earth do they think they are?

For that matter, who do any of the Apostles think they are?

For the past two weeks, we've followed the exploits of this group, the followers of an executed Jewish rabbi who, even after their leader was humiliated, rejected, and hung on a cross, even after they had been chastised and threatened and questioned by the authorities, refused to shut up and just go away. We've listened as they've healed the sick, proclaimed the resurrection of the dead. Forgiven people of their sins, and finally, today, as they stood at the very gates of the temple and restored a man paralyzed from birth. All without asking permission or getting any kind of approval at all from anyone.

The temple aristocracy are not amused.

These religious men have a lot to lose if the temple in Jerusalem falls into disrepute, which is exactly what they believe will happen if word gets out that uneducated and unauthorized people are preaching and healing.

So they arrest Peter and John, and once again bring them before the priestly council, hoping to make an example of them once and for all and force them into silence on the issue of their resurrected Messiah. Instead, Peter stands up to defend himself, and brilliantly turns the tables on these men, reframing the charges against him:

"A good deed has been done to a man who was sick." Peter argues,

He and John have done a mitzvah, an act of kindness, one of the foundational tenets of their religious beliefs.

What is the big deal?!

The big deal is that Peter and John have no standing. They have no authority. They have no business healing people at all, let alone in the name of a crucified enemy of the Roman State. And worst of all, they don't even seem to care that they could get everyone in a lot of trouble.

It's true. They don't care. Peter and John know that they had the reality of Jesus crucified and raised from the dead. What more powerful authority could you ask for?

Peter speaks a word of hard truth to these powerful men as he stands before them, saying that though they have all the training, though they have all the credentials, and all the authority, they got it wrong.

Peter audaciously proclaims that God sent God's own human self to us in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, and yet we rejected him because he did not meet our expectations, or follow our rules. But God raised Jesus from the Dead. The Spirit of God is not bound by the rules of this temple. The Spirit of God is not bound by the rules that govern cultural norms or even the rules that govern life and death. The Spirit of God is the one who has given the Apostles power that even the temple priests do not have because the Apostles are carrying on the work of Christ – proclaiming the truth of his resurrection and doing the work of love in his name.

In her acceptance speech for the Cecil B. DeMille award at the 2018 Golden Globes, Oprah Winfrey spoke her own word of hard truth to powerful men. Recognizing the deep need of the present moment, and hearing voices that cried out from the shadows, Oprah dared to use the power that had been given to her to speak out on their behalf. This is, in part, what she said:

“What I know for sure is that speaking [our] truth is the most powerful tool we all have. And I'm especially proud and inspired by all the women who have felt strong enough and empowered enough to speak up and share their personal stories... [They are stories] that transcend culture, geography, race, religion, and politics I want tonight to express gratitude to all the women who have endured years of abuse and assault because they... had children to feed and bills to pay and dreams to pursue. We all have lived, too many years in a culture broken by brutally powerful men. For too long, women have not been heard or believed if they dared to speak their truth to the power of those men. But their time is up. Their time is up.

I want all the girls watching here, now, to know that a new day is on the horizon!” Friends, this is the message of the Acts of the Apostles: A new day is on the horizon. The life and death and resurrection of Christ have made manifest not only a new day but a new age. This new age is ruled by one name,

and one name alone. It is the name in which the Apostles taught, and preached and lived. It is the name of Jesus, the name of Love.

Love – that cares more about what other people need than what other people will think

Love – That isn't interested in what day of the week it is, or if you've purified yourself

Love – that does not care if you hold the right credentials, act on the proper authority, or have the appropriate education for the task at hand.

All that Love cares about is that we seek the well-being of others as if our own life depended on it. Our beautiful homes, Our thoughts, and our prayers, Our well thought out arguments on the merits or the dangers of this work mean nothing if we can still see a brother or sister in need and yet refuse to help.

The audacity of the Apostles was that they refused to be bound by the rules that governed and maintained the world of men because they worked by the power and authority of the boundless love of Christ. We are called to be audacious in our love: to be bold, to risk, to break the rules, even to appear foolish, knowing that the same Spirit of God that moved through the Apostles moves through us, always, always guiding us toward love. Let us follow the call of Christ, and let the world know us by our love.

Amen.