**They Prayed for Great Boldness**

What is courage? I’ll can tell you what it’s not. It’s not the absence of fear. Fear is a good thing, a gift from God. Fear is a natural emotion that protects us from harm. If we recognize something harmful coming our way, fear gets our adrenaline pumping so we react, hopefully to escape the harm.

Unfounded fear is often a bad thing. Some people are paralyzed by fear. Courage is when you recognize potential harm but choose to act regardless. Courage is a resource that helps us to counteract fear.

Sometimes the resource is the assurance that what we fear is not quite as serious a problem as we thought. A little boy might fear getting his first haircut until he sees his dad get a cut first, showing him that there is no danger.

Sometimes the resource is knowing that we have a power to counteract a dreadful situation. For example we have Jesus who said, *Surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age*. Matthew 28:20

Courage is using resources, whatever our fears, in order to do the right thing.

Do you remember how Martin Luther went mano-a-mano with the all-powerful Roman Catholic Church when on October 31, 1517 he nailed his “Nine-five Theses” to the door of the Wittenberg Chapel challenging ecclesiastical abuses?.

About 3½ years later, on April 17, 1521 he stood before the highest Roman Catholic Council. A row of his books was set before him and he was asked if he would recant the things he had written. After a day to consider he replied that while he may have expressed himself too strongly against certain persons, what he had written he could not retract.

Having summoned a resource to counteract his fear, he faced the Holy Roman Emperor who was not simply the highest authority of the church, he was a civil authority who could have Luther killed with just a nod. I believe the resource Martin Luther called upon to counteract his fear was the Holy Spirit.

As we get into Acts chapter 4 we see fallout from healing a crippled man in chapter 3. The authorities were definitely not happy. Remember the chapter and verse divisions in our Bibles are basically arbitrary. This is a continuation of the story.

In case you don’t know the story or had Satan managed to keep you from church last week: Peter and John went to pray in the Temple in Jerusalem when they encountered a man who had been crippled from birth and was now begging for money. Peter didn’t have any money but instead healed the man in the name of Jesus. Then he preached a sermon to the crown who had gathered to gawk at the now walking a jumping man.

We pick up in chapter 4, *The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people.* Acts 4:1

The leaders of ancient Israel consisted of three groups and two parties. There were:

* The priests, sometimes called the rulers.
* The elders, or the heads of the tribes of Israel
* The scribes, or lawyers, experts in the law and in the oral tradition explaining the day to day application of law.
* One of the priests was called the captain of the Temple guard, “‘*ish har ha-bayith*”, “the man of the mountain of the house”

The two parties associated with the Temple were:

* The Sadducees, wealthy men who collaborated with the Romans in order to maintain their privilege. They knew how to spin politics to their favor.
* The Pharisees, strict followers of the Law and traditions.
* The Sadducees hated Jesus for political and economic reasons; the Pharisees hated Him for theological reasons.

These men had gotten all worked up against Peter and John. *They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.* Acts 4:2

Greatly disturbed is a nice euphemism. They were probably frothing at the mouth, gritting their teeth, veins bulging from their necks. Here were two followers of the Nazarene capturing the imagination of the masses, showing off by healing a cripple, obviously by some type of trickery.

Already people were turning to Jesus by the thousands. So they did the natural thing. They arrested Peter and John, holding them overnight in jail (Vs. 3).

*The next day the rulers, elders and teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and the other men of the high priest’s family. They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: “By what power or what name did you do this?”* Acts 4:5-7

Try to imagine Peter and John standing before the High Court of Israel, 70 angry, scowling men, all of whom were educated and wealthy. It’d be like sitting at a table in front of a Senate committee without the benefit of a lawyer.

Notice who was included, Annas and Caiaphas, two of the principles in Jesus’ illegal trial and execution.

The court had to be very careful because common people already hated the High Priest family. Under Roman occupation that position went to the highest bidder. Annas ran the “Bazaars of Annas”, the market in the Temple where they sold animals for sacrifice and changed money for required offerings and tax. These were the very tables Jesus overturned when He cleared the Temple.

The inquisition was a smokescreen. *“By what power or what name did you do this?”* Peter had been clear at the time of the healing:

* *In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.* Acts 3:6
* *By faith in the name of Jesus this man was made strong.* Acts 3:16

What they really cared about was that Peter and John were saying that Jesus rose from the grave. They had had Jesus killed. That should have taken care of this once and for all. Now people are believing that Jesus was alive.

The rulers and Elders and teachers of the law wanted to make it look like Peter and John violated protocol, as if they disregarded the chain of command. So they used the still-common technique of distraction: *Under whose authority did you heal this man? Who gave you permission?*

Peter summoned the same resource of courage that Martin Luther used when he stood before the Council at Worms saying “*Here I stand. I cannot do otherwise*.” Like all of us who have been baptized, Peter had received the gift of the Holy Spirit, and now *filled with the Holy Spirit* was able to overcome fear.

*Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: “Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and are asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: 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.* Acts 4:8-10

“*Filled*” is an aorist passive verb. That means he didn’t fill himself. He needed more than his own strength to answer them so the Holy Spirit filled him.

The authorities recognized that this was something extraordinary. *When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus.* Acts 4:13

Neither Peter nor John had been to a rabbi school. Neither was from one of the important educated families of Israel. Neither had been a student of Hillel or Shammai.

In the words of F. F. Bruce, *How could untrained laymen like these so ably sustain a theological disputation with the supreme court of the nation?*

They knew the answer. It was Jesus. They had been present perhaps 20 years before when 12 year old Jesus was…*in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions.Everyone who heard Him was amazed at His understanding and His answers.* Luke 2:46f.

These men had been with Jesus. They witnessed His execution and they claimed to have seen Him alive again afterward. The same power that raised Jesus from the dead is the power that now filled them to testify of the truth of the resurrection. The indwelling power of the Holy Spirit gave them courage.

The word here, παρρησια means courage, or boldness, or confidence, or outspokenness. Whatever fear they experienced, being threatened by men who have proven their willingness to murder their opponents, was counteracted by the Holy Spirit in them.

How were they able to summon that power? What motivated them to trust the Holy Spirit to sustain them in the face of fear? What was the key to their courage? **Resurrection!** Jesus’ resurrection and ours.

They knew Jesus rose from the grave. They believed that the empty tomb was a sign that God could and would raise them to life as well. One author put it like this, “*The resurrection made death a helpless comma in eternal life*”.

It was possible that the Sanhedrin would have them killed instantly, or maybe they would make the rest of their lives miserable. But they remembered Jesus said, *I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die.* John 11:25f

They remembered that He said, *Do not be afraid of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather, be afraid of the One who can destroy both soul and body in hell.* Matthew 10:25

I think Peter also remembered Jesus saying*, “When you are brought before synagogues, rulers and authorities, do not worry about how you will defend yourselves or what you will say, for the Holy Spirit will teach you at that time what you should say.”* Luke 12:12f

It took a lot of courage, yet strengthened by the knowledge of the resurrection, Peter went on to preach a powerful sermon:

* He reminded them that they killed Jesus.
* He pointed out that Jesus is the subject of the prophet who said, *The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone* (Psalm 118:22). Everyone knew that was a prophecy about the Messiah.
* Peter said*, Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved.* Acts 4:12

*Since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together.* Acts 4:14f It probably went something like this:

* *We can’t deny that the man has been healed.*
* *Neither can we let this go on. It’ll threaten our position and power and wealth.*
* *It’s all over town already. We have to stop them*. (Vv. 16f)

Verse 18, *Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus.* Acts 4:18

I don’t think they were paying attention. Peter and John were filled with courage. They weren’t about to be intimidated into silence. *Peter and John replied, “Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God’s sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”* Acts 4:19f

I am reminded of three men a half a millennium earlier, who when faced with being thrown into a burning furnace unless they denied God said,

*If we are thrown into the blazing furnace, the God we serve is able to save us from it, and He will rescue us from your hand, O king. But even if He does not, we want you to know, O king, that we will not serve your gods or worship the image of gold you have set up.* Daniel 3:17f

This is the same sentiment captured by Mercy Me with their song, “*Even If*.”

Wherein does anyone find the power to say things like that?

It’s the power of the Holy Spirit, the power of the Resurrection, the power of Jesus’ name.

We have that same Holy Spirit. We have that same power, that same resource. We can display that same courage?

I’m not saying that we can command the Holy Spirit to enable miraculous expression at our discretion. That’s up to Him. He’ll do it when He knows that power will secure the message in someone’s heart.

We can, however, trust the Holy Spirit to give us courage to go into all the world and make disciples.

* We believe in the resurrection, right?
* We believe that God has the power to work in us, don’t we?
* We believe that God can do through us the things He did through the early Christians.
* Can we then trust that the Holy Spirit will fill us with **courage**?

I can think of three ways that the Holy Spirit can fill us with courage:

1. He can fill us with courage to be transformed by Christ.

The Bible tells us, rather than conforming to the world, we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds. (Romans 12:1f) Peter and John were transformed from fearful to bold.

In our study of Biblical Eldership we read today about major failures of many churches or denominations in America. Two failures stand out: One is rejecting sound Biblical doctrine in favor of what is popular. Another is being preoccupied with comfort thus being unwilling to act against false teaching.

We can trust the Holy Spirit to fill us with courage to stand on truth even when it’s unpopular or uncomfortable. Our culture or society may not like us, but we can stand on the Word of God.

Peter and John believed that Jesus of Nazareth, the man the Jews had crucified, was the only way to salvation into eternal life. That definitely went against the mainstream of theology at that time. The Holy Spirit filled them with the courage to overcome fear so to stand on that truth and say, *We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard.* Acts 4:20

He can do the same for us. Whatever fears keep us from speaking, the Holy Spirit can transform us from fearful to bold.

1. The Holy Spirit can fill us with the courage to pray for boldness.

*After further threats they* (they being the rulers and elders and teachers of the law) *let them* (Peter and John) *go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.* *On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.*  *Acts 4:21-24*

They recognized that the Christ event was God’s plan. Now notice what they prayed, *Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.* Acts 4:29

These people knew what they were up against. They knew the danger. They knew the threats. They didn’t ask God to take them out of the situation. They asked Him to make them bold to continue in the face of opposition. They knew even death was not the last word. The last word is resurrection.

The same power that raised Jesus from the grave can raise us no matter what people may do against us. Whatever fears we have, He can fill us with courage to do the right thing, just like Peter and John, or Martin Luther, or Rachel Scott and Cassie Bernal when they faced down Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris at Columbine High School in 1999.

Instead of excusing our fears, we can pray for God to fill us with that courage of boldness. Understand, when you pray for boldness God is likely to answer your prayer and you’ll find yourself in situations where you will need that boldness.

1. The Holy Spirit can fill us with the courage to live like Jesus and serve like Jesus.

This is what we talked about last week. The filling of the Holy Spirit involves bearing the “Fruit of the Spirit” to live like Jesus, and using the “Gifts of the Spirit” to serve like Jesus.

Here’s the thing, I believe a lot of people don’t seek the fruit and gifts of the Spirit because we’re afraid. We don’t know what Jesus will have us do. We’re not sure we want to do it.

* *What if He wants me to work with poor people?*
* *What if He wants me to speak up in a group? I can’t do that. I’d be too scared.*
* *What if He wants me to sacrifice my comfort?*
* *What if He wants me to risk?*
* *What if He wants me to give my time?*
* *What if He wants me to be a Good Samaritan and give my money?*
* *If I open myself up to the Holy Spirit to fill me, it might change my life and I like my life just as it is.*

My friends, the same power that raised Jesus from the grave, the power that enabled the early Christians to face the might Roman Empire, is the power that will be with us through every experience. That same power is the power that will enable us to say…

* *I am going to help that poor family.*
* *I am going to speak up in that group.*
* *I am going to risk my comfort.*
* *I am going to sacrifice time to serve others.*
* *I am going to be that Good Samaritan.*
* *I am going to allow the Holy Spirit to lead me.*

Yes, it is necessary to summon a resource to counteract our fears. That resource is none other than the Holy Spirit we received when we were baptized. I pray that the Holy Spirit will make you bold in every way.