

Seeing What You Believe

Acts 4:1-14

Focus: The Holy Spirit gives ordinary, “uneducated” folks what we need to speak what we believe

FUNCTION: Encourage to speak the truth of our faith boldly.

Prayer for Illumination

Acts 4:1-14

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. They were greatly disturbed because **the apostles were teaching** the people and **proclaiming** in Jesus the **resurrection of the dead**.

They seized Peter and John, and because it was evening, they **put them in jail** until the next day.

But **many who heard the message believed**, and the number of men grew to about five thousand.

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?"

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.

He is

"`the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone. '

Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

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. But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, **there was nothing they could say**.

Sermon

Lately, I'm having the growing conviction that one of the most important tasks for the church today is to learn how to talk intelligibly about its faith.

In our culture, **the church is beginning** to look more and more like it did **back in Peter and John's day**.

We are coming to the end of a **titanic shift** of how our society understands itself.

50 years ago, everyone grew up in church,

Knew the **10 Commandments** and the names of the **12 disciples**

Had a clear understanding of what it meant to be Presbyterian, Catholic, Methodist, Baptist, etc.

Prayers were said at football games and at the opening of meetings of governmental bodies.

This is no longer the case.

We **still see vestiges of it here in Floyd**, to be sure.

We know that many of the business owners and civil servants are people of strong faith.

We sometimes hear prayers at the high school games still

But as a nation on the whole,

we are seeing the end of what people call "Christendom", or a nation and culture whose overarching values come from followers of Jesus and the church has a place of privilege.

The church of the apostles was a minority in a thoroughly Jewish society that had been established for centuries.

In this passage, the **church is brand-spanking new**, merely weeks old after the giving of the Holy Spirit.

They have **no buildings** on the corner of Fifth and Main.

They have **no formal clergy** or presbyteries.

They **simply have Good News and the Holy Spirit.**

And with that alone, they **are utterly transforming the world.**

While there is no question that the first believers still consider themselves quite Jewish,

they are **in the extreme minority** with their talk about the Messiah.

Our passage starts out with the pronouncement that the Sadducees,

Who formally ran the Temple

And **the temple police,**

Who did their bidding,

Were not pleased with Peter and John continuing to spread these "rumors" about Jesus being a resurrected Messiah.

Partially because **Sadducees didn't believe** there would be an earthly Messiah (as the Pharisees did)

But thought that there would simply be a time in the future where God would redeem the people and restore them to relationship with God.

But Peter and John were here to say that that time had come, that God indeed had come in the crucified and resurrected Jesus.

So the first century Christians, as a distinct minority, were in a war of ideas.

And now, so are we.

Faith in Christ is continually receding into the background of our culture.

After millinia of being the dominant religion, **we are becoming a minority again.**

In some ways, **we've done this to ourselves:**

For society now looks at Christians as those whose ideas are **backwards, antiquated, uncivilized and unscientific.**

Some **public voices in the church** sound more condemning than gracious and no one wants anything to do with it.

Many have experienced violence instead of the love of God and naturally people are turned off.

Other ways of understand the world around us become easier to accept:

Two common views that are easier on the palate are the **scientific worldview and the relativist worldview.**

Scientific says that the only thing that is true is that which can be tested and known with the five senses.
Everything else is suspect.

Relativist views says that what is true for you is okay for you and what is true for me is okay for me.

Both views can be rather attractive:

One appears to be rooted in cold, hard, undisputable fact.

The other seems to preserve the freedom, personal conscience and makes for a nice, easy, unobtrusive way to get along.

The problem is, it's not the whole truth. It's incomplete.

As people who celebrate Easter every year, we say there is more to understand the dynamics of the universe.

And we don't accept it simply because we're suppose to.

Take the scientific worldview:

I'm a fan of science. I don't think there's anything wrong with it, personally.

There are some brilliant people unlocking the miracle of how our world and our bodies work all the time and we enjoy many conveniences because of it.

The shortcoming is that there are more ways of knowing than just what we can test with our senses.

Remember the test you did in science class, where you put a magnet under a piece of paper and watched the iron filings spread out in an arch?

If you think about it, you never see the magnetic field. It has no mass, nothing visible or material to test.

But we deduce from the consistent behavior of the filings that it does in fact exist.

So we see there are other ways of "knowing" than merely what we can taste, touch, see

(This is a quick example.
Don't have time to dig into all the nuances and implications)

And **relativist** worldview (the most popular today and easiest) has serious problems.

If truth is only relative to each individual, then I could murder one of you and it should be okay.

Because the truth I subscribe to may allow me to take from you what I need to get what I want.

But we treat things this way because our society says talk about beliefs is taboo.

In the last century,
our society has lifted up personal autonomy
as the highest virtue
over the virtues that people have lived by for millinia.

But in order to manage the copious number of people and idea different than us,

we excuse ourselves from the conversation and go live our own lives without any regard for the state and well-being of one another.

In a nutshell, if everything is true, then nothing is true.

But we have come to know the Truth, personally.

It is the resurrected Messiah, Jesus,
who teaches us to love and serve God in “spirit and truth”.

However, believing this way is no longer popular.

Some even consider it arrogant, offensive, un-modern.

That faith is a consolation for weak-minded people.

Now I know for a fact there are no weak-minded people in this church, rather **people here seeking to be in touch with the greatest truth; the greatest reality there is.**

Here is where we can begin to take cues from Peter and John.

They are called to task about their teaching about Jesus and most especially, Peter’s healing of a man who had been crippled since birth.

It’s important to note that if Peter and John were **spouting craziness** in the public square,
they would have been shot down long before now.

But it says that **people didn’t just come listen curiously** but that lives were being changed forever.

It says by now, they’d **grown to 5000 people!**

That’s like 84 Presbyterian Churches of Floyd!

In a matter of weeks!!!

They’re **arrested** and **called in for questioning** because they are a **threat to the “acceptable” ideas** of the day.

The hearers of their Gospel teaching heard something that stirred deep in their hearts and drew people to know more.

They **must have really caused a stir** because not just a few officials show-up but the high priest’s entire family!

We should recognize some of those names,
like Annas and Caiaphas as they played their part in the passion narrative, along with the entire Sanhedrin.

But it sounds like they got a larger hearing that Jesus!

Once they finally get them to court the next day, the question they ask is an important one.

"By what power or what name did you do this?"

When a rabbi taught his disciples or others, it was customary to quote notable rabbis from the past or even the rabbi you learned from.

At hearing the question, Peter informs the onlookers that it is in the name of Jesus the criminal, the blasphemer, that he has said done these things.

Throughout Jesus' ministry, people could not help but note that he was one who spoke with authority;

That is to say, he didn't quote other people but spoke as the one who we needed to be quoting.

And Peter and John are claiming just that.

Far from quoting a famous rabbi, it is important to note that Peter and John are not rabbis themselves in the first place!

The honor of becoming a rabbi fell to only a VERY select few;

Only the top students. Everyone else went to work at the family trade after some remedial education.

People didn't have the Time-Life Books of rabbi teaching at home to read after work.

Only the elite.

It would be like a welder leaving his job on Friday and showing up Monday at Harvard to teach a doctoral level philosophy class.

It is says Peter and John are **conspicuously ordinary men.**

Average Joe's. Untrained in the way of rabbis.

And yet here they are, talking like rabbis.

And the remarkable thing, people are listening!

**And more than anything,
their courageous proclamation stood out.**

The Priests and Sanhedrin were left speechless, not simply from their bold proclamation, but from the healed man who stood right before their very eyes.

I hope you can see something of yourself in Peter and John.

We laud them as **heroes in the faith**,

Having the privilege to follow Jesus on earth and to be
personal witnesses of the Risen Christ.

And while they set the bar high,
we must realize that **we are no different from them.**

We too live in a society that is increasingly hostile to claims of belief and faith.

We aren't being carted off to judicial hearings.

But there are lots of people who look at us and wonder how
we could believe what we believe.

And this is where we have to be ready.

They were "uneducated" average folks facing-off against the
popular ideas of the day,

Pointing to the unmistakable truth in Christ.

The same power that healed the crippled man and drew
thousands to hear the Gospel

Is the same power at work in us, in this very room!

The Early Church was serious about speaking its faith
spending time in the public eye, ready to give an answer.

Because people are asking the questions now,
about what matters; about what is real.

The same trend that shows how the church is losing its public
footing is the same one that says people are searching for
meaning now more than ever.

Sure, science is great but it leaves one feeling cold, snuggling
up to hard facts, wanting to know more than just "how"
but "why" ..

Relativists too sense the emptiness in an "anything goes"
system and are hungering for more.

We are called to courage; to be ready to answer the questions
when people ask.

And not simply with Bible quotes (because most folks don't
accept it)

But with conviction, confidence and love.

The truth is true whether someone believes it or not.

We've experienced the greatest truth in Jesus.

And now the world is counting on us to speak to it again.