

February 22, 2009     Supporting the Church by Our Witness     Acts 4:1-10

It was a mini court room sort of high drama when the rulers, elders and teachers of the law confronted Peter and John; questioning their actions that ended not only with a handicapped man being able to walk but with thousands of people being converted to Christ. It was a shocking event which left folks “in the know” scurrying to do damage control. There would be thousands of direct witnesses to the events that happened, events that would change the world.

Think of it, a grown man who had been born handicapped was given his ability to walk for the first time in his life and all in the name of resurrected Jesus Christ. No one could doubt the evidence; it was rock solid. Acts, Chapter 3, reads, “Peter said, ‘Silver and gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.’ Taking the (man) by the right hand,(Peter) helped him up and instantly the man’s feet and ankles became strong. He jumped to his feet and began to walk.” That was all surprising enough for those onlookers but for the Sadducees, a leading sect of Judaism in Jesus’ day, who didn’t believe in the resurrection at all this, was cataclysmic. If there was no such thing as the resurrection from the dead how could these two guys raise somebody up and help them walk in the name of a dead guy; a guy they helped put to death a short while before. Where did that power, that authority come

from? The ramifications were enormous. If what happened to Jesus was for real, they would be undone.

These guys were really asking, "Who said you could do that?"

These very religious people witnessed one of the miraculous events in history and because of their theological and political point of view couldn't be happy for the guy who was walking but were instead threatened by the possibility that he was healed in the name of Jesus.

We have two very different sorts of witness that happened that day, the ones who believed in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior and those who would go on as did many of the religiously "correct" in telling that Jesus wasn't resurrected from the tomb but rather that his disciples stole the body. Matthew's account says in 28:11-15:

MT 28:11 While the women were on their way, some of the guards went into the city and reported to the chief priests everything that had happened. <sup>12</sup> When the chief priests had met with the elders and devised a plan, they gave the soldiers a large sum of money, <sup>13</sup> telling them, "You are to say, 'His disciples came during the night and stole him away while we were asleep.' <sup>14</sup> If this report gets to the governor, we will satisfy him and keep you out of trouble." <sup>15</sup> So the soldiers took the money and did as they were instructed. And this story has been widely circulated among the Jews to this very day.

So, what kind of witness will we be? What is our testimony as to what God has done in the past or what He is doing today? What is God doing in our lives

today? I know there are a lot of folks who are at least leaning towards Christianity or call themselves Christian but have no idea what we are talking about today. The only witness they can truly give is that of someone else's experience with God and can be likened to Paul's words to the Corinthian church, "as seeing a poor reflection in a mirror." I believe that is one of the real problems in the church today. Science has tried to steal away the possibility of the miraculous. Scholars have stolen the idea of God at work in the lives of humanity and caulked it all up to a series of coincidental experiences that to the "fool" might look as though there even was a god. Even Religious scholars have trusted their scholarship instead of allowing the witness of the very words they study to touch their lives.

Because we aren't reading the Bible in faith, because we aren't praying, because we aren't acting out of faith, the church in the US in particular has become a weak witness in the world. But, we are called to be witnesses, even when it seems like no one else is doing the work.

Now I know that a lot of us don't really like the idea of personal, intentional witness because we don't want to "threaten" the lives of others and what they believe. Let me tell you, I am eternally grateful that God sent Christian teachers,

and preachers, and friends and even a few onetime strangers to bear witness to me to the love of God. Part of our witness must be how we live our lives but there are times when if we really believe that God has called us to be his followers, then we need to be able to tell our story of the journey to God through Jesus Christ.

Some folks are called to be Evangelists, some preachers, some teachers, etc., but all of us are called to be able to articulate what it is that God has done in our lives. God has placed people within our sphere of influence that **we** are to reach for Christ. All of the good deeds, all of the social justice sort of things we do only take us so far. The Bible says that even nature bears witness to God but *alone* it has no power to offer another human being the gift of salvation. We must be able to, as Peter wrote in 3:15, “Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.”

What is your story, the story of your journey with God as revealed in Jesus Christ? Who introduced you to Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior? How did you come to the place where you received and claimed the gift of salvation for yourself and not basing your journey on the merits of a parent or grandparent? What was it like for you when you knew your sins were forgiven and you got a

brand new start; a do over? Where did it happen? Who was there with you when you made that confession? What has God done since in your journey? What have you done with your life in Christ? How have you grown in faith and grace? These questions are vital to our witness to the world. If Christians don't tell the story, no one else will.

Some of you may not have much of a story to tell. Perhaps you are just getting started – it's ok. *Know your story!* Someone else who is on the journey, maybe just beginning or someone who has been on the path for decades will want to know. Will you have all the answers to questions someone might ask? Probably not, that isn't necessarily what we are called to do. What we *are* called to know is in some fashion or another, to say or portray, "Jesus loves me this I know, for the Bible tells me so." and how that has played out in your life.

I think we've made this all too complicated. People just need to know that there is life in Jesus Christ, that they needn't be separated from God; that Jesus Christ bridged the gap and through him we are reconciled to God. There's a song they sing often in Jamaica that goes like this: "Everybody ought to know, *everybody ought to know*, who Jesus is, *who Jesus is*. He's the Lily of the Valley,

the bright and morning star; He's the fairest of ten thousand to my soul.

Everybody ought to know. *Everybody ought to know* Who Jesus is, *who Jesus is*.

Quickly I want to say that there is another kind of witness for which we are responsible. That is what we have to say to one another and to the community regarding our church. What are you saying about our church? What does the community see when they look in on us? Do they see a body of eager Disciples? Do we portray confidence in Christ? Do we share an enthusiasm for the Kingdom of God? Does it look like we glad to be here?