Sermon copyright © 2012 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

Easter 4B
Peace, Seattle
April 29, 2012
Acts 4:5-12

BOLD WITNESSES

We are a resurrection people, people of the empty tomb, and our first lessons during the Easter season have been coming from the book of Acts, St. Luke's second volume work.

The book of ACTS answers the question:
What does the gospel do, once it has been unleashed into the world?
Where does it go? What effect does it have? Whom does it touch?

These are the kinds of questions explored in the book of ACTS, and today we're privy to another installment in the story of Peter and John that unfolds in chapters 3 and 4. (Follow in pew Bibles)

To grasp the whole story, we have to start in the third chapter of ACTS, where this story begins.

There we learn that Peter and John are going up to Temple to pray when they are confronted with a crippled man, a beggar, asking them for help. Peter takes the beggar by the hand and says:
I HAVEN'T GOT A COIN TO DROP IN YOUR BUCKET, BUT WHAT I DO HAVE I GIVE YOU:
IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST OF NAZARETH, WALK… And instantly the man is healed.

The news of the healing spreads like wildfire and quicker than you can say "TWITTER" a crowd has gathered and Peter seizes the opportunity to present the gospel message.

He preaches the resurrection, lifting up the name of Jesus, and the response is electric... thousands of new believers join the movement.

This development is simply too much for the guardians of institutional religion.
You see, they thought they had put an end to all this JESUS business—and now, here it is popping up again, accompanied by a powerful sign that could be denied.

Threatened by Peter and John's "unauthorized" ministry, and they rush in to exert control by putting them under arrest.

SO…What does the gospel do when it's unleashed in world?
It brings healing/salvation to some, and it threatens the vested interests of others.

At the beginning of chapter 4, a trial takes place, (4:5ff) and we can't help but remember that Jesus himself, only a short time ago, stood before the very same assembly of leaders.

Then Peter, (v 8) filled with the Holy Spirit begins to speak to them, and his speech, which is really a sermon, forms the core of today's First Lesson. What does he preach?

- That the man—once crippled but now healed—who stands before them is in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth...the stone that was rejected has become the cornerstone.

Sermon copyright © 2012 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

It's worth pointing out how DIFFERENT the Peter we meet here is compared to the Peter we meet earlier in the story Luke.

In fact, Luke gives us three very different views of Peter in the closing chapters of Luke and in the opening chapters of ACTS:

Luke 22:33-34 When Jesus announces his impending passion at the last supper, Peter is gung-ho for the battle! "Lord, I'm ready to go to prison and to death!"

Luke 22:54-62 But later that same night, after Jesus is arrested, Peter denies any connection w/Jesus, and does it three times.

Acts 3:12ff & 4:8ff Contrast that with the Peter we meet in ACTS, who testifies to the healing/saving power of the name of Jesus with boldness and power.

SO…What does the gospel do when it's unleashed in world?

- **It transforms a brash, impulsive hothead into a disciplined disciple.**
- **It transforms a fearful, denying coward into a man who is willing to stand up and declare that God is saving the world through Jesus.**

This is what the gospel, the power of the resurrection, does: it transforms the lives of God's faithful people and then moves and ripples through and beyond them to have an affect in the world.

When's the last time you testified to the power of Jesus in your life?
When I was working as a carpenter I heard Jesus' name invoked quite a bit, but not in this way.

When's the last time you spoke boldly to anyone about what Jesus was doing in your life?

If we could read one another's thought bubbles right now, what do you think they would say?

- I don't have, I haven't figured out, the right language for talking about Jesus in my life?
- If I talk about Jesus I'm afraid I'll be lumped with Christians who are exclusive or judgmental?
- I'm more comfortable walking the talk than talking the talk?
- I just don't want to draw attention to myself?
- I'll leave talking about Jesus up to the professionals?

I can imagine all these responses and more. But I also wonder at times if the reason we (yes, we) lack the boldness to invoke the name of Jesus is because we fear what such power might do in terms of rearranging our own lives? If the prospect of a life-changing encounter with the living Lord requires giving up too much control, and we're just not ready for that…yet.

After all, to intimately know and be known by Jesus can turn your life upside down—just ask Simon Peter.

In the presence of the risen One, we come to realize he knows the dark, hidden side of our lives as well as the public face; he knows things we've managed to keep successfully hidden; he knows us better than we know ourselves.

Yet, the gospel declares, this Jesus, who knows our failures and weaknesses and anxieties, is the Good Shepherd who takes away the burdens we carrying; who lays down his life so we might have life; who saves and heals us.

Sermon copyright © 2012 by Pastor Erik Kindem, Peace Lutheran Church, Seattle, WA. All rights reserved.

When we are given the bold gift of invoking the holy name of Jesus, the powers that would silence us hold no power over us.

When we confess that Jesus, and not some other person or thing, is Lord of our life, life begins to turn, and we find ourselves on the road to transformation from being timid wallflowers...to being radiant, joyful, brave witnesses.

Of course, this power of transformation, as Peter himself points out, does not come "by our own power or piety" (3:12). It is a gift which the Risen One himself pours out on us in the Holy Spirit. And because it is He who gives it to us, no one and nothing can take it away.

Peter and John were ordinary, uneducated men—deniers and deserters to boot—when the Spirit of the risen One took hold of their lives and turned them into preachers and healers.

When the authorities released them with the command that they speak and teach no longer in Jesus' name, (4:18-20) Peter and John stood their ground:

> "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge;" they say, "for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard."

This story from Acts reminds us that the gospel of resurrection refuses to be hemmed in… It will roll away any stone that seeks to control, contain, or limit it.

In the final scene of this story (4:19-20), after Peter and John are released, they return to the community to share their story, and what happens next is both amazing and instructive.

Instead of being cowed by this close call, instead of turning inward, instead of circling the wagons, the entire community is invigorated and this is what they pray: (4:29)

> NOW, LORD, LOOK AT THESE THREATS, AND GRANT TO YOUR SERVANTS TO SPEAK YOUR WORD WITH ALL BOLDNESS, WHILE YOU STRETCH OUT YOUR HAND TO HEAL, AND SIGNS AND WONDERS ARE PREFORMED THROUGH THE NAME OF YOUR HOLY SERVANT JESUS.

In the face of threats to their well being, the prayer of the community is not for **protection** but for **boldness**! Not for **caution** but for **strength** to proclaim, indeed, to **live** like Jesus!

And "when they had prayed," Luke tells us, "the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness." **Their prayers were answered.**

What a privilege it is to bear the name of Christ. To become the vessels for his saving and healing power!

Let us join our hearts in prayer:

Saving Lord, through your Spirit you emboldened the witness of Peter and John, making them fearless proclaimers of your gospel. Shape us, too, into bold witnesses for your kingdom. Help us to move beyond whatever stands in the way of bearing witness to your story in our lives, and give us such language and confidence that we are always ready to give an account for the hope that is in us. Amen.