**Uniquely Jesus: The Story Continues April 15, 2018**

**Acts 4:31-35, Make Us Bold**

**Coffee/Question:**

**In your opinion, what would indicate that a church is healthy; that a church is rightly following Jesus?**

**Feedback**

**Read the passage – Acts 4:31-35**

**Based on the passage we’ve just read, are there indicators we missed?**

**- all the believers were one in heart and soul**

**- all the believers shared everything they had with one another**

 **- there were no needy persons among them**

 **- those with means would from time to time liquidate assets and give the**

**proceeds to the apostles for distribution to anyone who had need**

**- with great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of Jesus**

**- much grace was upon them all**

**It is a remarkable thing when a group of believers are one in heart and soul.**

**A good question to ask is: what steps did they take to achieve this?**

**How did they learn to be so generous? Who came up with the idea to liquidate assets in order to ensure everyone had enough?**

**Another great question to ask is: how were the apostles able to speak with such power and authority regarding the resurrection of Jesus?**

**Or, what did those believers do, to draw the grace of God, so that it could be said that “much grace was upon them all?”**

**Remember: it had only been weeks, maybe months, since Jesus’ resurrection.**

**How did that church become like this…. in so short a time?**

**There are two important things to note about the prayers of that church.**

**First, before they asked anything of God, the church focused on and declared what they knew to be true of God –**

**he is the Sovereign Lord;**

**he created all that is;**

**he directs history to bring about his purposes;**

**he is the God who speaks, who hears and who acts.**

**Second, their “ask” of God was not self-focused, but gospel oriented.**

**They asked God to help them do their part – *“speak your word with great boldness.”***

**And they asked God to do what only he could do – *“stretch out your hand to heal and to perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of Jesus.”***

**Their prayer expressed their understanding and conviction that they were on mission, not for, but with God.**

**What happened when they finished praying?**

**How did God answer?**

**Acts 4:31a**

**The place where they were meeting was shaken.**

**“What” was shaken?**

**Not them…but the place.**

**What does that word “shaken” mean?**

Barnes Notes: *The word which is translated "was shaken" commonly denotes "violent agitation," as the raging of the sea, the convulsion of an earthquake, or trees shaken by the wind…*

*The language here is suited to express the idea of an earthquake….*

<http://biblehub.com/commentaries/acts/4-31.htm>

**What did God communicate by shaking the place where they prayed?**

**We find an answer by checking another instance in Scripture where something similar happened.**

*Exodus 19:18 - Mt Sinai shook*

*I believe we learn from this example, that in Acts 4:31, when the place where they were meeting, shook, it was because… God manifested his presence among them.* **http://kite.ois.net.au/~jvd/Sermons/Acts4,31.htm**

**For everyone who was there, it was a never to be forgotten experience.**

**They had connected with God, and God had connected with them.**

**They knew the Sanhedrin’s threats were real.**

**But the church had spoken with the One who was greater than any threat.**

**They had asked him, not for protection, but for boldness.**

**And God dramatically answered – not with an audible voice; but with a physical shaking.**

**Nothing gives boldness to a follower of Jesus like the presence of God.**

**This is why the phrase “I am with you,” is one that God uses with his people, over and over and over.**

**This promise is applicable in all situations; and it gives the follower of Jesus hope and courage.**

**This was the promise which made the difference in Humboldt, Saskatchewan this past week.**

**Quote from National Post**

**How else was the prayer of the believers in Acts 4 answered?**

**Acts 4:31b.**

**It is important, as Peter wrote in his first letter, that Jesus’ followers be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks the reason for the hope that they have.**

**If you and I only do good things, without speaking of Jesus, for those who see, or even experience the good we do, the focus remains on us, and not Jesus.**

**Living our faith and speaking out our faith must go hand in hand.**

**The good news of Jesus, the reason for the hope we have,** answers three huge questions that are pertinent to every human being:

1. Who is God? (2) Who am I in light of who he is?
2. And what impact does the claims of Jesus have on my life?

What a person does with the gospel of Jesus is the most important decision they will ever make…because it determines where they will live in eternity.

I think one of the reasons why Jesus’ followers can feel inadequate about sharing Jesus…is because such much rests on the gospel.

Mack Stiles writes about this.

He says*: [Sharing the hope we have] doesn’t spring out of us fully formed and perfect. It’s sensitive communication about deep things, with enormous ramifications for people’s lives. It takes effort, practice, and planning.*

*Ninety-nine percent of the time I share my faith, I see things after the fact that were slips, fails, and just plain awkward mistakes.*

***But awkward is better than silent****…*

 *I take great joy in knowing that God…takes our efforts to share our faith and uses them to change eternity for others.* <https://www.desiringgod.org/articles/awkward-is-better-than-silent>

**But being prepared with an answer is only part of the equation.**

**We are reminded in Acts 4:31 of the other piece.**

**Their lives were filled with the Holy Spirit.**

**The presence of the Spirit within them helped them to do what?**

**To speak… the word of God… boldly.**

**It may be that we will face at some point what that church faced – individuals in a place of authority over us, who are opposed to Jesus and the news of him, and who insist that we not speak of him.**

**But the experience of the church in the time of Acts is not unusual; it is the norm.**

**From the years of his public ministry… to this present time, there has been and always will be… opposition towards Jesus, his cross, his resurrection, his power to make a person spiritually alive, and to give to all who believe in him… new life.**

**William Booth said this about 150 years ago.**



**Without the Holy Spirit filling our lives, you and I cannot and will not boldly announce the news of Jesus.**

**I like Charles Spurgeon analogy. He said:**



Dr. Hallesby described it like this in his book, *Prayer*:

*"Wherever we meaningfully connect with God, some of his omnipotence streams in upon us, into our souls and into our bodies. And not only that, but, through us, it streams out to others."*

What do we learn from this?

“Prayer together” is at the core of how a community of believers, with love for and in gratitude to Jesus, participate with God in what he is doing on this earth, even in the face of strong opposition.

When those believers prayed together, their willingness to follow Jesus and to live to carry out his mission… was connected with God’s limitless power.

Let’s come back to the questions we asked at the beginning.

**What steps did the church take to be one in heart and soul?**

**They prayed together; they focused on God.**

**And the Spirit who filled their lives and gave them boldness… also created within them a unity of heart and mind.**

**They didn’t create this unity – but by praying together, they invited the Spirit to work in them and among them.**

**And where the Spirit is welcomed, one of the things he creates is unity.**

**How did they learn to be so generous?**

**Who came up with the idea to liquidate assets in order to ensure everyone had enough?**

**They prayed together; they focused on God.**

**And the Spirit who filled their lives and gave them boldness… also placed in their hearts a desire and the specific idea of how to be generous.**

**How did the apostles learn to speak with such power and authority regarding the resurrection of Jesus?**

**They prayed together; they focused on God.**

**And the Spirit who filled their lives, gave them the words to speak; and worked alongside of them so that those words gripped hearts.**

**What did they do, as a group, to draw the grace of God, so that it could be said that “much grace was upon them all?”**

**They prayed together; they focused on God.**

**Doing so… put God in his right place and themselves in their right place.**

**They humbled drew near to God.**

**And as they did, the Spirit drew near to them and filled their lives with his presence, which in itself is an act of grace.**

**And through the Spirit in each of them, grace permeated their community.**

There are four different “take-aways” from this passage.

* Jesus always leads his people to challenge the spiritual status quo of the culture in which they live.

That status quo is always…. some version of “make sure the good you do, outweighs your bad.”

Jesus tells the truth – and the truth is not that we need to be good.

The truth is, all of us are spiritually dead… because of sin, which has touched every facet of our life.

No one can fix what has happened to them.

We need a Savior. And that Savior is Jesus.

Do people in Sooke know this? Not unless they are told!

* This passage teaches us that as Jesus’ followers, we are not self-sufficient when it comes to the task Jesus has given to us.

It is impossible to do what Jesus has asked of us, without the help of the Holy Spirit.

How do we position our hearts to catch the wind of the Spirit –that we might turn people to God?

By praying together.

* **As they prayed together… they were filled with God’s Spirit.**

**We tend to think of the filling of the Spirit as being an individual experience. This passage teaches us that it is a collective experience that often happens when… we pray together.**

* This passage asks of us – who or what do we love most?

If it is ourselves, we will save ourselves.

But if it is Jesus, we will give our lives for him.

**Do you remember the woman who had poured out on Jesus’ feet a perfume worth a year’s wages? Why did she do that????**

**Because she loved him.**

**Those believers in Acts 4 were likewise extravagant in how they expressed their love for Jesus.**

**Except it wasn’t perfume they poured out; but their lives.**

**They knew if there ever was a time to push ahead; if there ever was a moment of incredible opportunity it was then, and no threats were going to stop them. They were “all-in.”**

 **This passage inspires us to live with the same commitment.**

 **And prayer together is indispensable!**

**Before we sing our closing song(s) I invite you to pray together in small huddles of 3-4 people.**

**Before you ask anything of the LORD, thank him for who he is.**

**And then ask him to enable us – this church – to speak the good news of Jesus with great boldness!**

**Ask him to do in our town those things that would clearly reveal to people the person and the power of Jesus.**

**The Blessing**

**Ephesians 3:16-21.**

**May you know the blessing of Christ living in your heart through faith…**

**May you experience the blessing of grasping the immensity of Christ’s love…**

**…and of being filled with the fullness of God…**

**…so that the Lord may do through our lives more than we could ever ask or imagine…**

**…so that his fame would spread in this city and beyond.**

**What has been the history of the church of Jesus Christ?**

**That question is wide-open.**

**It’s been a history of remarkable growth.**

**Like the story, which Jesus told, of the mustard seed – his church started small, 120 people in Jerusalem, and now numbers in the billions, in every nation of the world.**

**On another level, the history of the church has been a story of disappointment and failure. In every generation, things have been done by “so-called Christians” that have turned people off and have tragically harmed the reputation of Jesus.**

**But that aside, the history of the church is a story of changed lives.**

**Wherever the good news of Jesus has been shared, the lives of men, women and children who have believed in him, have been transformed.**

**Transformed lives have resulted in transformed marriages, families, schools,**

**neighborhoods, communities, workplaces.**

**Connecting to the passage we are going to consider today, the history of the church is also a story of collaborative opposition from unseen, dark spiritual forces and humans who live and function without reference to God.**

**Jesus said to his followers, John 16:33, *“In this world you will have trouble.”***

**The trouble Jesus is referring to is the negative reaction that his gospel triggers in people; the hostile pushback that surfaces with his assessment of the human condition and the solution he uniquely offers.**

**But what Jesus had to say, didn’t end with that thought – in this world you will have trouble. He added, *“But take heart! I have overcome the world.”***

**How did Jesus overcome the world?**

**By his life which he gave in sacrifice for us.**

**What Jesus did when he died in our place dealt with humanity’s sin problem.**

**We know God accepted what Jesus did on our behalf, because God raised him from the dead.**

**And to all who believe in Jesus, the same resurrection power works within them, to bring to life their soul that had been spiritually dead.**

**Jesus said to Nicodemus, John 3:19-21:**

*This is the verdict: Light has come into the world, but people loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil.****20****Everyone who does evil hates the light, and will not come into the light for fear that their deeds will be exposed.* ***21****But whoever lives by the truth comes into the light, so that it may be seen plainly that what they have done has been done in the sight of God.*

**The light that has come into the world…is Jesus.**

**His person exposes the presence of radical evil within the human heart.**

**Jesus in Matthew 15:19 said, *“For out of the heart comes evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.”***

**What is so frustrating about Jesus is that he isn’t shy to call us out.**

**And he uses strong language when he does so.**

**Look again at John 3.**

**He speaks of – *“deeds that are evil;” “darkness that is loved;” “exposure that is feared;” “a refusal to come into the light.”***

**It is the tendency of human beings to downplay or to hide the existence of moral darkness within the heart – from ourselves; from others; from God.**

**Why do you think we do this?**

**Why are we afraid to be seen for who we really are?**

**Do we fear that if we are known, we won’t be loved?**

**Jesus doesn’t tell the truth about who a person is in God’s sight, just to make them feel bad.**

**As Jesus tells the truth of who we are, he also announces what God has done to rescue us. Jesus invites a person “to live by the truth,” and “to come into the light.” Jesus offers to anyone who will receive it - God’s radical mercy and forgiveness.**

**It is bizarre, isn’t it, that such good news offends human pride?**

**Is it because humans see themselves as being spiritual McGuyver’s – able to work their way out of whatever moral or spiritual dilemmas they find ourselves in?**

**Is this what causes offense?**

**That God insists we can’t fix what we broke and that his solution – Jesus - is the only solution?**

**This is what Peter and John had told the members of the Sanhedrin – the Jewish Supreme Court.**

**Acts 4:12: *“****Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”*

**It was this – the insistence that only Jesus could save – that caused offense to the members of the Sanhedrin and is why they threatened Peter and John with harm if they continued to speak of Jesus.**

Baseball catcher Yogi Berra played a game in which the score was tied with two outs in the bottom of the ninth inning.

The batter from the opposing team stepped into the batting box and made the sign of the cross on home plate with his bat.

Berra was a Catholic, too, but he wiped off the plate with his glove and said to the pious batter, "Why don't we let God just watch this game?"

This may be good theology when applied to the outcome of a baseball game.

But it is terrible theology if it were to be applied to the way we live our lives

and carry out the work of the church.

God isn’t a spectator who watches what we do.

**Why would we pray together for?**

**Not because we have to.**

**But because once our hearts have been captivated**

 **by the remarkable person of Jesus**

**and his extravagant love for us,**

 **out of gratitude we will offer**

**They knew God had heard them.**

**They knew God would help them.**

**God answered.**

**And God’s answer enabled to do**

 **what their discussion had led to believe they had to do.**

**And it wasn’t to run.**

**And it wasn’t to tone it down for a while.**

**But when a person responds to God’s invitation of amnesty**

 **and asks Jesus to forgive them**

**and invites him to lead their lives,**

 **the presence of God’s Spirit within them,**

**begins a remarkable re-orientation.**

**That situation and how those believers responded**

 **and what their prayers focused on**

**remind us and teach us that when a person chooses to follow Jesus**

 **they are given the remarkable privilege**

**of participating with God in what he is doing here on earth.**

**When everything goes well,**

**Realizing our inability often drives us to seek after God.**

**There are many situations where we sense our helplessness**

 **and realize if God doesn’t intervene then there is no hope.**

**We have a part to play and many times God’s answer to our prayers involve us. But without God’s presence and power what we do will come to nothing.**

**In those times we recognize that if God doesn’t intervene we are helpless we can’t do or that if God doesn’t intervene**

A sign of our times, religiously, is the fact that Hans Küng's otherwise brilliant theological work *On Being a Christian* did not have a chapter in it on prayer. When asked about its absence, he apologized and admitted it was a serious oversight. But, he explained, at the time of writing he was so harassed by the Vatican and busy trying to meet his publisher's deadline that he simply forgot. That is my point exactly. Prayer is always the first thing to go when we get caught up in the world's pace. And only prayer can deliver us from that pace.

**The result of such freedom was that some have allied with God,**

**while others remained opposed to him.**

**What those followers in Acts 4 did**

**was frame their experience of being threatened with harm,**

**in this bigger perspective.**

**It wasn’t that a few religious leaders didn’t like them.**

**They were being threatened because they had aligned their lives with God**

**and his cosmic purposes.**

**Acts 4:25b-26.**

**The Scriptures tell us that the human race**

 **is in rebellion to God and God’s messiah,**

**and that every generation participates in this rebellion.**

**Acts 4:27-28.**

**The hostility of Herod, Pilate, the Romans**

 **and the people of Israel towards Jesus**

**was but that current generation’s expression of revolt against God.**