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

**Acts 4:31-35**

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

**Read the passage – Acts 4:31-35**

**When was the last time you were amazed by the power of prayer? Explain what happened.**

**How can your faith in God be expressed through your prayers? Be specific.**

**When you read how the church in Acts 4 prayed, how does their example encourage and challenge you?**

**What happened when they finished praying? Read Acts 4:31a**

**Why do you think God did this?**

**How else was their prayer answered? Read 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 we only do good things, without speaking of Jesus, the focus remains on us, and not on him. The good news of Jesus, the reason for the hope we have,** answers three huge questions that are pertinent to every human being: Who is God? Who am I in light of who he is? What impact does the life and claims of Jesus have on my life?

**Interact with Mack Stiles statement:** *[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>

**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? Share what has happened when the Spirit has helped you in the same way.**

**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.**

**Do you agree/disagree with William Booth’s statement and why?**

**“The chief dangers which confront the coming century will be religion without the Holy Spirit; Christianity without Christ; forgiveness without repentance; salvation without regeneration; politics without God and heaven without hell.”**

Dr. Hallesby wrote 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 about his statement resonates with you?**

**Interact with the four “take-aways” from this passage. How do you see them applying to us? How do we practice them?**

* Jesus will always lead his people to challenge the spiritual status quo …which is some version of “make sure the good you do, outweighs your bad.” Jesus tells the truth about who we are and our need – it’s impossible for us to do sufficient good to make things right with God. The issue, according to Jesus, is that all of us are spiritually dead because of sin, which has touched every facet of our life. We can’t fix what has happened to us. We need a Savior. And that Savior is Jesus. But people in Sooke don’t know this.
* This passage teaches us that we are not self-sufficient when it comes to the task Jesus has given to us. It is impossible to do without him. How do we the followers of Jesus, who are called to challenge the spiritual status quo, position our hearts to catch the wind of the Spirit – to be filled with his presence and power in order that we might turn people back to God? By praying together…and before we pray by deliberating reminding ourselves as we declare who God has revealed himself to be…in creation and in the Scripture.
* **As they prayed together… they were filled afresh with God’s Spirit. Acts 4 asks us to ponder this connection between praying together and the filling of our lives with the 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? **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.**

**Pray together.**

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

**And then ask him to enable the people of SBC 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.**

**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.**