

Being a Courageous Christian
Acts 4: 1- 22

It was dark, in the early hours of the morning and I was afraid. I was sitting in the passenger seat of a truck, next to a driver whom didn't really know all that well, wondering what I should do.

I knew I had to do something, and I was looking for an opportunity to do – but every time I thought it might be the right time to make a move, my fear welled up and I backed down... curious?

No I hadn't been hitchhiking and I wasn't a hostage or anything like that.

I was actually getting a ride home from work from a co-worker like I did every night and I was struggling with a conviction that I should share my faith with him.

He knew I was a Christian and I knew that He had grown up Catholic and only went to mass once a year with his parents at

Christmas - but I'd never gotten beyond a superficial religious conversation with him.

I wanted to ask him if he had questions about God or Jesus or the bible, if he wondered about those things and perhaps we could have a deeper conversation about faith... and just maybe it might lead to a saving faith for him.

But I remember was how afraid I was to broach the subject because it would be awkward. I was afraid that he would think I was weird and there was the possibility that he might not want to give a ride to work anymore if I was going to preach at him.

Maybe you have also found yourself in a similar situation where you have wanted to speak to someone about faith in Jesus Christ but you were afraid to do so.

To frame it in terms of the 8 Steps of disciple-making that we looked at in the spring – you wanted to build on Step 1 where

you had made a connection with someone - and move on to Step 2 or 3 where you can share a bit more about Jesus...

And I think it's important to acknowledge that when we decide to take the next step in the process of making disciples there is an element of fear which prevents us from sharing our faith with those whom we have built credible connections.

We may be afraid of sounding fooling foolish, of saying things the wrong way, fear of failing to communicate well...

We may be afraid that the people who we speak to will ridicule us or reject us or that it will make things awkward for us afterwards and they will think differently about us.

In some cases there may even be the risk of physical harm and/or punitive consequences for speaking to someone about our faith.

So brothers and sisters, I'm sure that we all know that it's important to speak to others about faith in Jesus Christ... and

we know we should do it... but the fact is that we need help to get past the fears which are preventing us from doing so.

And this is important friends – not only because it is a matter of being obedient to our Lord Jesus – but because this initial part in the process of making disciples happens best within the context of the connections and relationships that you've developed in your daily life.

There are common interests and experiences which build respect and credibility. Your life is the witness that people need to see... so they can believe that faith in Jesus is real and that His forgiveness and love can change hearts and lives... and that you are willing to endure hardship and suffer for something greater than what society and culture can offer.

There is a great deal at stake here – and we must remember that the devil opposes us in this as well - so brothers and sisters we are in need of courage... We need to be made into courageous Christians who can step past fear and speak to others about faith in Jesus Christ.

So let's look at Acts 4 this morning to see what the scripture addresses our fears of sharing faith in Jesus, and I pray that as we do the Holy Spirit will indeed fill us with courage and make us courageous.

So maybe your fear is – "I'm just not the kind of person who can do this."

And that may be true... and in Acts 4 we see that this was the same of Peter and John. They were just ordinary, unschooled men who used to catch fish for a living.

They weren't known to be particularly courageous – in fact they acted cowardly and deserted Jesus when he was arrested. And for all of Peter's talk about being ready to die with Jesus – he had denied Him three times...

But...In this story we see how different they are. They've been filled with the Holy Spirit and they are bold and courageous and willing to stand up against the authorities

So here's your Courage Booster – If God can work with them He can work with you.

It's true! Do you want to know something? In spite of the fact that you may have no formal training, you may not be outgoing, whatever – you are better equipped to invite people to church and share your faith with others than what I am, because people expect it from me.

They flip into "relate to the Minister" mode and act a certain way around me and they expect me to talk about church because it's my job.

But if you are speaking with them about it, it comes across as far more genuine and authentic, they can relate to you better than they can relate to me.

Now maybe you are afraid that "People aren't interested in this."

Well friends the story in Acts 4 is preceded by the better known event in Acts 3 where Peter and John shared Jesus with someone whom they knew needed it, even though the person wasn't asking for it.

They healed a crippled man who was begging for money outside the temple - responding to him with that now famous response "We don't have any silver or gold, but in the name of Jesus Christ rise and walk!"

So here's your Courage Booster - People need what you have, even if they don't realize it.

Trust me on this one; I know the difference between offering people something they need versus something they don't need. You see I did a short stint selling Cutco knives.

These are amazing knives, very good quality, in fact my mom still has the ones she bought from me to help me out over twenty years ago, but they are also amazingly expensive.

I didn't do very well at selling these knives because deep down I knew people didn't "need" them.

But fellow disciples of Christ – you can offer what people they really need – Jesus Christ. You can introduce them to Jesus Christ and He will meet their needs through the power of the Holy Spirit.

Now what if we are afraid of "People rejecting, ridiculing, or threatening us?"

Well in this story the people who had their needs met didn't reject, ridicule or threaten Peter and John! The man who was healed hung onto them, all the people gathered around them – not an angry mob but a cheering crowd.

The people saw this amazing miracle and then listened to what Peter and John taught them about Jesus Christ and Acts 4:4 says *"But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand."*

So here's the Courage Booster – “When people experience Jesus meeting their needs, many will embrace or at the very least consider what you have to share about him.”

If you weren't aware - that is how Young Life works. Can you think of a group of people who would be more likely to ridicule, reject or threaten someone who wanted to talk to them about Jesus - than a group of non-Christian high school students? I can't...

But every Wednesday during the school year, right here in South West Calgary over fifty teens – mostly non-Christians kids from Earnest Manning High school pack themselves into someone's basement, where Young Life leaders meet their need to have a crazy fun time, and then these teens willingly listen as one of the leaders shares more about who Jesus is.

And they keep coming back for more... they are listening and considering and learning more about Jesus.

That's en-couraging – amen?

Now sometimes we have the fear of “Other people won't take me seriously after I talk about Jesus.”

Well friends, if you look at this story, and the following stories in the book of Acts - everyone took Peter and John very seriously – especially the Religious Leaders!

Because what the disciples were teaching and doing in Jesus name contradicted what they taught about the resurrection, and it threatened their power.

Jesus was a far more attractive option than what they offered. So they arrested them, tried to intimidate them, threatened them – but they didn't take them lightly and they didn't ignore them – they took them seriously.

Courage Booster – If you present Jesus, as the bible presents him, it makes people take notice! They either love him or hate him, but they can't ignore him.

It's like when you have to go through security at the airport. If you make a joke about a bomb, they take it very seriously, or if you are crossing the boarder into the U.S. you don't make silly a comment to the border guard about trying to smuggle things in when he asks if you have anything to declare.

They take these things very seriously and you'll find yourself in trouble pretty quickly.

It's the same with the kingdom of Darkness - no relation to the U.S. - The enemy knows the threat which Jesus and His disciples pose to their power and takes it very seriously.

So if you do receive kickback, trouble, harassment or persecution – it's not about you, it's the kingdom of darkness fighting back trying to keep its power. So, how smooth is life going for you... are you the kind of Christian the devil has to worry about?

All you have to do is share the real Jesus – as the bible presents Him and you'll be taken seriously.

And of course the last Fear that we might – well probably have - is "I won't know what to do, or say."

Brothers and sisters did you know that public speaking is the number one fear in the general public, and speaking publicly to someone in the general public about Jesus is probably the number one fear for most Christians.

But in this story there is another character that is working behind the scenes and He is responsible for the courage and boldness displayed by Peter and John and the miracles that they do.

The Holy Spirit is the source of courage and boldness *and gives them* the right words which convey this. In fact because of the Holy Spirit working in Peter and John all the rough treatment, intimidation, and threats don't deter them one bit.

Courage Booster - We have been given the Holy Spirit and we are promised that we will be given the words to say.

But friends I think having the Holy Spirit is a bit like being the Incredible Hulk. What do I mean?

Well according to the scripture our in baptism we are promised the Holy Spirit, and for most of our lives I think we experience him as sort of a back-ground force working in our lives to help us believe in Christ, and grow in faith. We're always saying "God works in mysterious ways" and that's true.

But the Incredible Hulk really comes out only when Bruce Banner gets angry.

Now in the say way I think that we don't often experience the courage and power of the Holy Spirit flowing through because we never put ourselves to get into situations where He needs to come out.

We want to feel courageous first – and then we'll go and talk to someone about Jesus... then we'll go and invite someone

to come to Christ Care or to church, or tell them how Jesus met our spiritual thirst.

But brothers and sisters - courage comes when you engage and confront your fear by taking a specific action first, when you still feel afraid.

And the Holy Spirit suddenly shows up out of nowhere to carry you through it, giving you the power that you didn't realize was available to you, but was there all along.

You can be the person who shares their faith, invites people to church because the Holy Spirit will work in you to overcome your fear.

We've seen how it happen for Peter and John and their story stands as an inspiration for all of us as we go out this week, looking for opportunities to share Jesus with people who come across our path.

So Brothers and sisters - it is my prayer that the Holy Spirit will use what was written in the scriptures about the encounter that Peter and John had with the Sanhedrin - for us...

That He would come and work in our hearts and minds so that we go from here today inspired, not pressured... that we are en-couraged, but not co-opted.

So that we could stand up to whatever fear, or whatever person, or whatever situation attempts to block us from sharing Jesus with people as say as Peter and John did...

What is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. (Acts 4:19)

So go out - be bold, be brave, be a courageous Christian!

Amen.