

How Can We Keep From Speaking?

June 19, 2022 Sermon given by Cheryl Johnson, UMCG member and Guest Preacher

In the lesson this morning the presence and power of the Holy Spirit is expressed in Peter's healing of a 40-year-old man who had never walked.

Peter- filled with the Holy Spirit bid him to rise and walk – in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth – whom they had crucified.

A large crowd had gathered – and watched as the man rose, walked, and was healed.

How could this be? Jesus of Nazareth had been crucified – though there was talk that he had risen from the dead – his followers said that believing in Him offers forgiveness and eternal life.

Jerusalem was abuzz over what they had seen. The leaders of the Temple had also taken note. So, the next day they gathered to decide “how to handle this event and put a stop to those stories and being saved from sin and gaining eternal life.”

They had to keep these followers of Jesus from speaking!

Peter and John were brought before the council. Peter, filled again with the Holy Spirit, declared – that the Holy Spirit had healed the man and that the healing was done in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom they had crucified.

Conquering death - eternal life – admitting sins - this was way too much for the Council. Too many people had seen this man healed -- these followers of Jesus were becoming much too powerful!

Not knowing what to do – the Council decided it was in their best interest to release Peter and John.

After their release, Peter and John gathered with the other followers and prayed to God that he would grant to them the power to speak His word with ALL BOLDNESS in the name of Jesus!

That powerful message is ours to claim – as Christians – as followers of Jesus Christ!

Can we be disciples today? Are we open to being emboldened by the Holy Spirit?

Truly how can we NOT speak so boldly now as then?

In his book *We Make the Road by Walking*, Brian McClaran writes that the Spirit that moves among us is the same Spirit that moves in and through all Creation.

Certainly, here at UMCG we try to continually speak and work to spread the teachings of Jesus - in all our missions, forming relationship and finding ways to work together with the people of Hased House – We are planning a geothermal HVAC system for furthering the sustainability of our planet.

We have seen and felt the gift of the Holy Spirit in our work and worship.

That gift is the Spirit of being alive for God in the world and is ours to claim.

I have often thought about how easy it is for us to worship God in the comfort of this beautiful sanctuary that offers us safety and peace.

For some time, I have asked myself if I truly have the courage to follow Jesus. Jesus never sought to be worshipped.

He did, however, over and over again, ask that we follow him.

Following Jesus demands more from us than worship - it demands that we act in all things as Jesus would.

That's a tall order for us humans.

Where do we find the courage and wisdom to speak and act like Jesus?

Here is where God, knowing our human frailties, offers us the presence of the Holy Spirit to guide and direct us in speaking and acting boldly.

In our world today there are many competing forces that REALLY challenge our desire to be as God calls us.

It's so easy to just go along and not make waves - perhaps even stay silent.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer, the German Lutheran pastor, who lost his life speaking out against Hitler's Nazi regime, puts silence in perspective:

Silence in the face of evil – is evil itself!

God will not hold us guiltless.

Not to speak is to speak

Not act is to act.

When we choose to be silent, we become part of the very issue we seek to change and transform.

So then how can we keep from speaking? We need to remind ourselves that we don't do these things without God's help.

We must guard against coming under the ideology or similar force that convinces us that evil is over there among THEM and that moral righteousness is only here among US!!

Paul had much to say about Spiritual warfare and that the struggle was against INVISIBLE systems and structures of evil.

Then as now the real enemies are invisible realities like racism, greed, fear, ambition, nationalism, and religious supremacy.

The Holy Spirit leads us to boldly and compassionately stand for those who are being harmed – God's Holy Spirit spreads true aliveness.

To be at work with the Spirit is to transcend all boundaries. to be with the Spirit is to learn to measure success not by how much we consume or how fast we consume it, but by how we will live, care, and serve.

As Christians we believe ourselves to be followers of Jesus Christ who taught that seeking justice, doing good works, and love and justice for the world and one another comes at a cost – but if we keep from speaking the cost will be much greater!

We really aren't able to keep from speaking.

So, like the original disciples, let us invite the Holy Spirit and the love of God through Jesus Christ to empower and sustain us in all things!

Amen!