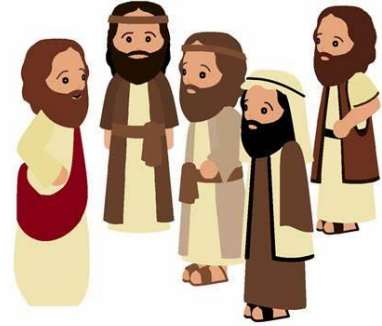


The Acts of the Sent Ones

Arresting circumstances

Acts 4:1-22

This is the point at which the very thing the disciples had feared came true. After Jesus' resurrection they had been meeting behind locked doors through fear of the Jewish leaders (John 20:19). And now a cohort of priests, Sadducees and the captain of the temple guard came and arrested Peter and John mid-speech. They could ignore the situation no longer. Something needed to be done before the whole thing got out of hand, a new uprising was triggered and the tentative status quo was lost. If this was a novel, we would dismiss as completely implausible the idea that someone who hadn't even been able to muster courage enough to admit to a servant girl that he was a follower of Jesus (Matt 26:69) a few weeks earlier was now standing his ground before a Jewish court.



Luke portrays it as a bit of a David and Goliath situation. Two ordinary, unschooled Galileans (v13) against a collection of the high and mighty of the nation's capital city – the rulers, the elders and the teachers of religion, the high priest, the leader of the Jewish council and various other members of their family (v5-6). Anyone who was anyone compelled into attendance for maximum intimidation. The issue was one of authority. They would show these country bumpkins with their northern accents who was in charge.

The Day of Pentecost (Acts 2) had changed everything. Jesus had promised *'You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem ...'* (Acts 1:8) and they had, and they were being. Peter was given wisdom to know what to say and how to say it, and the courage to speak with boldness. Here was the confirmation of Jesus' assurance: *'when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say, for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you'* (Matt 10:19-20). No longer was Peter cowering in the darkness, he was standing confidently in the spotlight.

You can even detect a hint of irony in what Peter said. 'Do you really mean to tell me you have put on this whole caboodle because we showed a little kindness to a disabled man?' But he wasted no time in going on to attribute the credit for the miracle evident before the eyes of everyone to Jesus, the true source of salvation. The authorities find themselves backed into a corner. Even ordering Peter and John to keep quiet had no effect. There was no way the lid of the open can of worms could be put back. The cola bottle had been shaken and nothing could stop it from spurting out. *'As for us, there's no question - we can't keep quiet about what we've seen and heard'* (v20). Finding themselves confounded and impotent, the authorities let Peter and John go free.

Read the passage again slowly a few times.

What verses jump out at you?

Is there anything you have noticed for the first time?

What thoughts or feelings do you notice arising within you?

Reflect on Peter's transition from fear to boldness.

Do you think Peter is now fearless or is it more that his fears are still present and that he has Spirit-given courage not to act in accordance with them?

Think of a time when you were either afraid of something or worried about a situation you were facing in which you experienced God's Spirit giving you strength and courage. How does this and Peter's experience give you hope in your current circumstances? Will you allow the Holy Spirit to take hold of you as he did with Peter? For what are you prompted to pray in response?

Peter will later encourage other believers: *'In your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have'* (1 Peter 3:15). He clearly links confession of Jesus as Lord with being willing to speak out.

If you would say that Jesus is your Lord, would you also be able to say that you are always prepared to tell others about the place he has in your life? Or do you find yourself still acting according to your fears? How do you want to pray in the light of this?

Peter and John are called to give an account of themselves as the result of an act of kindness. What is the evidence in your life that you are a follower of Jesus? In our current circumstances, are you noticing the new ways God is prompting you to show his love and kindness to those around you?

Think about the hope you have in this time of pandemic. How would you explain your hope to someone who asks? Reflect on what hope means in your life and pray that you will respond with courage to the opportunities God will give you to share it in the coming weeks.

Read Jesus words from Matt 5:14-16 several times: *'You are the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven.'*

Make them into a prayer, personal to you:

'I am the light of the world. A town built on a hill cannot be hidden. Neither do people light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, may my light shine before others, that they may see my good deeds and glorify my Father in heaven'.

We are reminded again that we too are the 'sent ones'; people to whom Jesus says: *'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you'* (John 20:21).