

Resources for Churches...

Responding to the Coronavirus

What Peter Did After That

Acts 3:11-26 We have been thinking since Easter about being sent - that Jesus breathes his Spirit on us and says to us 'As the Father has sent me, I am sending you' (John 20:21).

So far, we have thought about what we are sent with – the good news of Jesus and the hope he brings. We have thought about God being a sending God – sending is what God does. Being sent is not what we choose to do but what we are by nature when we become followers of Christ and his Spirit lives in us. We have also reminded ourselves what God has been saying to us through Luke 10:1-11, that being sent means going out in vulnerability, not having all the answers, going just as we are and just who we are. And so now we are carrying on reading the book of Acts to see what the first apostles (the 'sent ones') got up to after the Day of Pentecost to help us gain further insight into how God is calling us as 'Sent Ones' today to live in these strange and difficult times.

We are immediately struck by the sense of purpose that the believers now had. They had a conviction of what God was calling them to do, believing they were following the instructions Jesus had given them about how they were to live when he was no longer with them. But at this stage everything was new, as our situation is for us. In many senses they also were making it up as they went along. As we saw last time, on the one hand they were doing the usual routine things they did when Jesus was still with them and yet on the other they were open to the Holy Spirit's prompting to do bold, new things.

What we also see here is a case of one thing leading to another. Acts of kindness have consequences. People had seen the man running and jumping around in the temple courts before afternoon prayers, praising God at the top of his voice. They had all recognised him as the lame beggar they passed at the gate every time they went there. Just as Peter had given the man his attention, so now he was attracting everyone else's. They wanted to know more. The next opportunity has arrived. We now have the story of what Peter did next after what he did next!!

Read the passage through several times, noticing anything that jumps out at you.

Is there anything you notice for the first time? Talk to God about why these words might be particularly significant just now. What might He be saying to you through them?

Knowledge of scripture

In the same way that Luke reported in Acts 2:14-39 that Peter addresses the crowd with boldness, so again here he speaks confidently and clearly to the people who came to find him. It can be tempting for us to think that the Holy Spirit merely put knowledge into his mind and words into his mouth that hadn't been there before. Nearer to the truth is that the Spirit brought into mind things Peter already knew. Although we know Peter had not had a formal education (Acts 4:13), in common with most Jewish children of his day, he would have been schooled in his home and also in the synagogue. He would have been taught the scriptures and to memorise some, as well as the words of some formal prayers. On the Sabbath he would have heard them read and explained, and been steeped in the tradition of prayer. Then as an adult, Peter had spent three years in Jesus' presence and been sent out in Jesus' name to heal and speak and bring good news. And since the Day of Pentecost, he along with the other believers, had devoted himself to prayer (Acts 2:42). The Spirit works through this grounding and prayerful openness, bringing scriptures to mind and giving him new perspective and fresh understanding (John 16:12-14).

Think about how much scripture you know...



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- What place does reading the Bible and receiving fresh teaching have in your life?
- Are you like those of Peter's hearers who stuck to the traditional interpretations they had been taught, or are you open to new dimensions of understanding which God's Spirit is giving us in our new circumstances?
- Ask him to show you the things he wants you to recognise and live in accordance with today.

Giving an account

Peter explains the meaning of what had happened. I wonder what we would have said if people had come to us to find out more. What Luke is seeking to communicate in his recording of the events that followed the Day of Pentecost is what the Holy Spirit did through the first apostles. He is not trying to imply that everyone who receives the Spirit has to expect to be able to stand up and address the sort of crowd you might find in the Halliwell Jones Stadium! We will not all be called to give grand speeches like Peter, but we are all called to be witnesses. Jesus had told the disciples before his ascension: 'You will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth' (Acts 1:8), and much earlier: 'Do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time you will be given what to say' (Matt 10:19). And we find Peter himself, years later, writing to Christians scattered throughout Asia Minor due to persecution, telling them '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).

- Many people are asking questions at the moment. Some are re-evaluating the place of God in their lives. Think about what you could say if they ask you something. What is helping you? What is your experience of God just now? What scriptures are encouraging you?
- Do you trust that you will be given the words to say if you find yourself with the opportunity to speak up or does something hold you back?
- Use the words of Psalm 81:10 as a prayer: 'Open your mouth wide and I will fill it', asking God to help you to say what he wants you to say to the people he wants you to say them to.

Giving hope

Being witnesses isn't about having a prepared script that we spout out word for word, the same each time. If you have ever been flagged down on the street or had a knock on the door from people working for charities seeking new donors, or selling new windows, you will know the effect that that has! It's not even about our being able to express things in a coherent and logical order using fine words and grand concepts. It is just telling what we know, however it comes out; what we have seen and heard; how we fit into the story, just like a witness in a law court.

Peter tells the people how they fit into God's story; where hope can be found; how God wants to bless them. That this is what God has intended throughout the history of his people. How Jesus came to fulfil all that went before and how they can know God's blessing through repenting and believing in the good news (note the similarity with what Jesus announces in Mark 1:15). Peter is able to say this because he has come to understand where he fits in. He is also addressing the argument amongst the Jews at the time about who the true people of God were. He repeats what Jesus had taught (John 8:21-47) – it is not through biological inheritance but repentance, faith and living in God's ways. This might be less of an issue today, but even now there are people who believe themselves to be Christians because their parents or grandparents went to church.

People ask us questions because they are looking for hope, not information. It's our story they want to hear. How it works for us. If you don't find anyone asking you first, are you expressing concern for them? Asking them 'How is your day?' 'What is helping you through this?' This can then give them the courage to ask you the same thing. Then we can share with them about our hope in Christ (Col:1:27).

- How many reasons for hope can you find in this passage?
- What are your reasons for hope?
- Where do you sense hope, encouragement and growth in your life just now?

Hope is lived as well as explained. It was through what Peter did that the questions came. Ask God to show you what are the things in your life he wants you to pay attention to in the coming weeks – things to repent and turn away from, and things to turn towards so your hope becomes even more evident through what you do.