

Acts 4:5-16 Holy Spirit Boldness!

I'm sure that there would be those among us here this morning who have experienced bullying. It's hard when it happens to us - and even harder if we see it happening to our children.

One of our boys was bullied - in Kindergarten! He'd arrive home silent & scared. He hated going to school in the mornings. That was so wrong! We tackled the school about it, but back then, they weren't as diligent in dealing with bullying as they are today. A couple of suggestions were made, but the bullying didn't stop. So we moved our son to another school.

Bullying, in essence, is abuse of power. It happens in the playground, the workplace, and, as we are these days so painfully aware, in the Church. Sadly, abuse of power is endemic to our fallen human race.

In our reading from Acts this morning, Peter & John faced bullying in an extreme form. Annas, the High Priest, was more than a bully. He was a tyrant.

Annas was the power of the Jewish throne in Jerusalem. Before Roman occupation, the office of high priest was for life. But at this point, the high priest was only appointed for a year at a time, by the Roman governor. The appointment went to the highest bidder, who had to be someone willing to collude with the Romans. Annas had been high priest for 8 years. 5 of his sons, and now Ciaphas, his son-in-law, followed him into this office. Annas was able to hang on to his office because he was very rich and very ruthless. Any ideas how he might have amassed his wealth? -the crooked temple trade and exploitation of the people. It was nicknamed the Bazaar of Annas. (Politics, it seems, never really changes!)

The common people hated the high priestly family and it would have not taken much to start a rebellion. Annas perceived Jesus' growing popularity as a real threat and so when Jesus overturned the tables in the temple, it sealed his fate. Jesus was crucified.

Annas thought that with the death of Jesus, the threat was finished - but now here were two of his disciples claiming Jesus had risen from the dead, and performing miracles in his name....

So this is the backdrop for the readings from Acts 3 & 4. Tyranny, political unrest, hostility and very real danger for the followers of Jesus. The disciples had been hiding out for weeks in fear of their lives.

But then, as we know, PENTECOST happened. The power of the Holy Spirit burst into history, filled the believers, and they were completely changed!

This morning, as we look at what happened to Peter & John and as we explore this story with the eyes of our heart, let's allow their experience to inspire and excite us:

We know a bit about Peter & John. They were just bogans from Gailiee. Simple fisherman, not scribes or rabbis. No great education - yet we see a most amazing transformation taking place!

If you were here last week, you'll remember we read of the encounter they had with the lame man at the gate of the temple. Peter & John had gone to the Temple to pray. The man asked for a donation. In 3:4 we read, "**Peter looked intently at him, as did John....**"

Hmm. What was happening in the disciples heads at that instant - as they "**looked intently**" at the lame man? If I had to make a guess, I'd say that as they was brushing past this lame man, they noticed him in a way that they hadn't before. (This man would have been there every day) I suspect that both Peter & John then got a serious nudge from the Holy Spirit...

Acting spontaneously, Peter told him, "**I don't have any silver or gold, but I give you what I do have; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, get up and walk.**" And the man, lame from birth, got up and began leaping around, praising God. Mindblowing!

Just as an aside - it's enlightening to look at the way Peter & John responded to this nudge. Did Peter grab John by the arm, draw him aside, and begin to analyze the situation? "John, are you thinking what I'm thinking? Should we pray for this guy to be healed?" and did John say, "Maybe...but what if he doesn't get healed? We'll look like fools." Did they look around and weigh up the consequences; did they scope out the guards and calculate the risks? Nah. They JUST DID IT. I suspect it was a Holy Spirit impulse - no thought of analysis, no risk assessment.

I wonder if we were more attentive to the Holy Spirit, and more willing to take a risk and respond to nudges from him, whether we too might see some amazing things happen?

In our younger married years, when Jay & I were living in Warragamba, we did a relaxation course run by the local council. It was a course that attracted all sorts of folk, from stressed out executives, people on unemployment, to stressed out music teachers and theology students (that was Jay).

One of the participants was Rose. We chatted together a few times. One week, during the break, she went outside the venue and sat on the steps. The HS nudged me to go and talk to her. We both did, and had an opportunity to tell her about Jesus. That night, right there on the step, she prayed with us and gave her life to Jesus.

Yup - it happens.

With the lame man leaping around, praising God, and gathering a crowd, Peter, still moving in the power of the Spirit, began to preach. And it was no small crowd. There would have been literally thousands of people there!

Peter socked it to them! **“Jesus healed this man! The Holy and Righteous one you had killed!”** And when he’d finished his impassioned explanation, he challenged them. **“Repent therefore, and turn to God so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord.”**

And then of course, things escalated. The temple authorities, alarmed at the gathering crowd, the leaping lame man, and the passionate preacher, arrested Peter and John and dragged them off to prison till the next day.

At this point, in what seems to be an anxious turn of events, note this insertion by Luke, who is telling this story: v4 **“But many of those who heard the word believed; and they numbered about five thousand.”** FIVE THOUSAND converts! That was one anointed sermon!

The next morning, the guards brought Peter & John before Annas, Ciaphas and the entire high priestly family. Very intimidating. It may well have seemed to Peter & John that they too were now facing death - just as Jesus had warned them.

They were asked a hostile question: "By what power or by what name did you do this?"

Once again, the Holy Spirit empowered Peter. With great courage, boldness and clarity, Peter said (v10-12) "let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is 'the stone that was rejected by you, the builders; it has become the cornerstone.'

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.'"

Such powerful words from a man who had only a few short weeks ago, cowered in fear and denied his Lord. It was an incredible transformation!

What stands out for us in this most amazing story, is that ultimately, it is God's story. From the very beginning of the encounter God is at work:

- He moves Peter & John to stop & converse with the man.
- He moves the man to respond to Peter's request to stand. (He could have resisted, couldn't he?)
- He moves in power to instantly make the man's legs whole
- He empowers Peter to preach, giving him the words to say.
- He moves in the crowd, opening their hearts to respond to the call to repent - 5,000 of them! Instant mega church!
- He again empowers Peter to preach with great boldness, in the face of one of the most feared men in the city.

The God who was at work in the lives of Peter & John, the lame man and the crowd, is also at work in our own lives. I suspect at times we become somewhat rational and earth-bound. We read these stories in the book of Acts, but tend to leave them there, thinking either consciously, or unconsciously, that such things don't happen any more.

But nothing has changed. The book of Hebrews tells us, "God is the same, yesterday, today & forever" (Heb 13:8)

Cultures change - God does not. We change - God does not. When God promises his Spirit to those who believe, whether those people live in the first century or the 21st century, God keeps his promise!

In Mark 16:17, as Jesus gave his disciples the Great Commission, he promised, "these signs will accompany those who believe: In My name they will drive out demons; they will speak in new tongues; they will pick up snakes with their hands, and if they drink any deadly poison, it will not harm them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will be made well."

In those early weeks after Pentecost, when all these things began to happen, the apostles didn't have time to really analyse what was taking place. But later, later Peter wrote of it as being "partakers of the divine nature" ([2Pe 1:4](#)). John called it the "anointing ... received from he [that] abides in you" ([1Jn 2:27](#)).

And Paul described it as "Christ in you, the hope of glory" ([Col 1:27](#)).

What we see manifested all through the Book of Acts, and have continued to see through the history of the church, is the work of the Holy Spirit in and through God's people.

The gifts of Pentecost are given to each and every believer. They are given to each one of us here in this church today who believes.

Let us pray for an increasing sensitivity to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, and for the courage and boldness to act on them. And let us pray, particularly as we approach the celebration of Pentecost this year, for an increased yearning to see the same power of the Holy Spirit at work, not just in our own lives, but through us, touching the lives of all those people God may bring across our paths.

Amen