

Conley Memorial Presbyterian Church, Fourth Sunday of Easter, April 26, 2015

My First Speech

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April 26, 2015

Acts 4:5-12

Last week I talked about Peter and John healing the crippled man at the Beautiful Gate of the Temple and how Peter spoke to the crowd of witnesses who had seen what had happened. Peter and John spoke in an impromptu manner and condemned the Jews and the Jewish authorities for their ignorance in condemning Jesus to death.

While Peter and John were talking, the priests, the temple guard, and the Sadducees came, heard what they were saying, and arrested them. They were not charged with any crime but were simply tossed into jail because of their insistence that Jesus had been resurrected. The Sadducees did not believe in resurrection, claiming that there was nothing in the Torah to support such a claim. Thus we can assume that they arrested Peter and John for blasphemy.

Strangely enough, as I have told you before, the Pharisees did believe in resurrection and the Sadducees were at odds with them. They obviously could not charge the Pharisees with blasphemy but nevertheless they were outraged that Peter and John were testifying that Jesus had been resurrected and further that Jesus had made resurrection available to others. That they couldn't ignore and the following morning they put Peter and John on trial before the high priest Annas and his family, including Caiaphas who was president of the Sanhedrin and was the political head of the Jewish nation. This was akin to someone today being arrested and brought to trial before the U. S. Supreme Court and having to face down the Chief Justice and the eight Associate Justices without benefit of counsel.

Peter and James were asked simply, *"By what power or name did you do this"*, referring to the healing of the crippled man. Here they were, having to speak before the most powerful people in Israel, the rulers of the nation.

The high priest's family members were the rulers of the nation and Peter had to give the first big speech of his life, a speech to the highest authorities, the members of

the Sanhedrin and the Sadducees.

Jesus had warned his disciples that they would be brought before the authorities and be questioned. But he promised them that the Holy Spirit would guide their words.

I wish that had happened to me when I gave my first speech many years ago. Back then, Betsy and I had recently been married. I worked at that time for United States Steel Corporation and was told to go to Chicago to give a speech before a combined meeting of the Eastern States Blast Furnace and Coke Oven Association and the Western States Blast Furnace and Coke Plant Association to talk about theories that I had about steel making. I was in my 20's and had to defend my ideas before some of the highest ranking officials from every one of the nation's major steelproducing companies, ideas that were somewhat radical and contrary to generally accepted thinking in the industry. It was like I too was having to defend myself before the U. S. Supreme Court.

Betsy and I flew to Chicago the day before the meeting. I was as nervous as a cat and Betsy said that I kept repeating my speech in my sleep all night long. I got to the meeting early the next day. My speech was the last one on the agenda and I sweated out a long series of other speakers who droned on and on. I was getting more nervous by the minute. The program was scheduled to end at 5:00 PM and be followed by cocktails and dinner. The earlier speakers talked for so long that I was not introduced until about five minutes before five o'clock. There was no way I could give my speech without running the session far past the scheduled adjournment time so I simply said, "Gentlemen, it has been a long day and we are all tired. I know that you are anxious to get to the reception and dinner so I will forego my talk. Copies are available at the door to this room. Pick up a copy and, if you have any questions or need further information, please let me know. My contact information is in the paper. Thank you." I got a round of applause from a grateful bunch of officials and the meeting was adjourned.

I didn't have the Holy Spirit to guide me as Peter did, at least I don't think I did, but since then I never have been bothered about giving a speech.

So what happened with Peter? He couldn't tell the Sanhedrin and the Sadducees that it was getting late so let's forget about it and have some wine and dinner.

As our scripture reading tells us Peter was filled with the Holy Spirit and said, "*Rulers and elders of the people! If we are being called to account today for an act of*

kindness shown to a man who was lame and are being asked how he was healed, then know this, you and all the people of Israel: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed.” Peter then refers to Psalm 118:22-23, “The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes” but he rephrases the Psalm saying, “Jesus is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved.”

The Sanhedrin and the Sadducees were caught flat-footed by Peter’s speech. Scripture tells us that they saw the courage of John and Peter, two unschooled, ordinary men. They knew that Peter and John had been with Jesus but before them also stood the man who had been healed.

What could they do? Nothing! The people knew what had happened. It couldn’t be denied so they had to turn Peter and John loose. However they were warned to never again speak to anyone in Jesus’ name.

They might as well have been giving orders to a wall.

Peter and John replied, *“Which 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.”*

The Sadducees and the Sanhedrin could do nothing. They couldn’t punish Peter and John because the people were praising God for the healing that had occurred due to the kindness and compassion of the two disciples. As the April 22, 2014 devotion from Our Daily Bread says, *“Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit and a powerful context in which to generally speak to others about the Lord. One act of kindness may teach more about the love of God than many sermons”* from this or any other pulpit.

Thanks be to God.

Amen.

All scriptural quotations are from the New International Version of the Bible, 2011