

The Rest of the Story

Acts 3:11-4:22

(Series: Reimagining Church; Message Twelve)

November 8, 2020
Week 12

¹¹While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. ¹²When Peter saw this, he said to them: "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? ¹³The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. ¹⁴You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. ¹⁵You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. ¹⁶By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see.

¹⁷"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. ¹⁸But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. ¹⁹Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, ²⁰and that he may send the Messiah, who has been appointed for you—even Jesus. ²¹Heaven must receive him until the time comes for God to restore everything, as he promised long ago through his holy prophets. ²²For Moses said, 'The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your own people; you must listen to everything he tells you. ²³Anyone who does not listen to him will be completely cut off from their people.'

²⁴"Indeed, beginning with Samuel, all the prophets who have spoken have foretold these days. ²⁵And you are heirs of the prophets and of the covenant God made with your fathers. He said to Abraham, 'Through your offspring all peoples on earth will be blessed.' ²⁶When God raised up his servant, he sent him first to you to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways."

Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin

4 The priests and the captain of the temple guard and the Sadducees came up to Peter and John while they were speaking to the people. ²They were greatly disturbed because the apostles were teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. ³They seized Peter and John and, because it was evening, they put them in jail until the next day. ⁴But many who heard the message believed; so the number of men who believed grew to about five thousand.

⁵The next day the rulers, the elders and the teachers of the law met in Jerusalem. ⁶Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander and others of the high priest's family. ⁷They had Peter and John brought before them and began to question them: "By what power or what name did you do this?"

⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them: "Rulers and elders of the people! ⁹If 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, ¹⁰then 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. ¹¹Jesus is "the stone you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone."

¹²Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved."

¹³When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. ¹⁴But since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them, there was nothing they could say. ¹⁵So they ordered them to withdraw from the Sanhedrin and then conferred together. ¹⁶"What are we going to do with these men?" they asked. "Everyone living in Jerusalem knows they have performed a notable sign, and we cannot deny it. ¹⁷But to stop this thing from spreading any further among the people, we must warn them to speak no longer to anyone in this name."

¹⁸Then they called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John replied, "Which is right in God's eyes: to listen to you, or to him? You be the judges! ²⁰As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."

²¹After further threats they let them go. They could not decide how to punish them, because all the people were praising God for what had happened. ²²For the man who was miraculously healed was over forty years old.

Message:

We're re-imagining the 21st century Church in light of the 1st century Church. We're imagining what the Church might look like, actually should look like, if we take the power and presence of the Holy Spirit in our life and faith community seriously.

So after a couple of introductory messages on praying and waiting, we spent the first month (September) talking about the power and presence of the Holy Spirit.

Last month (October) we focused on the early Church's *Rule of Life* - i.e., the practices of the early Church that kept them walking close to Jesus and empowered by His Spirit. We noted the early Church was fully devoted to the *apostle's teaching* (i.e., to the Gospel), fully devoted to the *fellowship* (to the community), fully devoted the *breaking of bread* (calling people together around a table of forgiveness, grace, and blessing), and fully devoted to prayer (for God's Church, Mission, and Kingdom). We noted it wasn't multiple choice, it was "all of the above!"

This month, we'll be looking at the Church's mission. What is the purpose of "Church?" What is the work, duty, task of Church members (or what the early Church called "disciples"?)

Last week we talked about the five **marks of the early disciples on mission:**

1. They went to the Temple to Pray! **Prayer** marked their life.
2. They intentionally went where people didn't know (and even opposed) Jesus. Their **Passion** for the lost opened their eyes to see the pain around them.
3. Responding to the Holy Spirit, they intentionally engaged a lame beggar and gave him his legs back. **Power** marked their life.
4. They constantly talked about Jesus. People embrace Jesus. **Persuasion** marked their life.
5. Their faithful witness in the world was transforming lives. God's **Presence** marked their life.

This morning we'll focus on the **message of the mission.** The disciples are willing to risk their lives to **share** this **message** - literally and ultimately every disciple will lose their life for this message except John.

God has a heart for **lost people**; now, after spending three years walking with Jesus, **God's** heart has become imprinted on **their** heart (That is what happens when you spend time with Jesus - you begin to look like, think like, and talk like Jesus).

God is looking for people to share his heart - because when you share God's heart you start thinking about people as someone's sons and daughters, as brothers and sisters, then. . . like Peter and John, we'll get focused and fearless about getting them to Jesus.

Read Acts 3:12-4:22

In *Contagious Christian*, Mark Mittelberg tells of buying flowers for his wife in a grocery store (The good news - he's buying flowers for his wife; the bad news is - he's buying them in a grocery store!)

While waiting in the checkout line, he strikes up a conversation with an

elderly woman. She notes he is buying flowers. Mark says he's buying them for his wife. She says, *"I remember when my husband would buy flowers for me. He died many years ago, but I'll always remember."* They continued talking until she finished checking out, and she says good-bye.

As Mark's checking out, an idea hits him - a clear leading, a God-prompt: *"Give her those flowers."* He pays for his stuff, runs outside and catches up to her: *"I appreciated our conversation so much. I know your husband is not available to do this, so I'd like to give these flowers to you."* She was overwhelmed.

He went home and he told his wife, Heidi. (How do you tell your wife, "Honey, I bought you some flowers but the Holy Spirit told me to give them to another woman?" As a wife, do you wonder why the Holy Spirit didn't lead your husband to go back and buy another bouquet for you?)

But this woman was so moved she invited Mark and Heidi to have tea with her. Since that day, Mark and Heidi have lived in five different places. Every year she has tracked them down, sent a package of gifts for their kids and a letter saying how, even years later, she is still telling people about what he did - being responsive to the Spirit's leading.

Truth is, everyone is a *someone* - someone's son or someone's daughter, someone's brother or sister, someone's mom or dad; someone's husband or wife. **Everyone** that you see, come in contact with, talk to, matters to **God**.

THE PRIMARY QUESTION

When people heard what had happened to this beggar, they came running to see: *Who did this?*

Peter said: *"People of Israel, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if we had something to do with this? Our God, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his son, Jesus."* (cf. **3:12f**).

Peter quotes **Exodus 3:6**; it is the famous "burning bush" passage every listener would know. Jesus had quoted it when debating the Sadducees just a few weeks before (**Luke 20:37**). **Exodus 3** is the text where God calls Moses to lead his people out of bondage and slavery. In the Old Testament, this is a major transitional moment.

By quoting this passage, Peter is saying, *"It is **happening again**."* This time, Peter is talking about **Jesus**. He doesn't mince words (**3:13f**). He is saying, *"remember that time when God acted spectacularly and rescued his people through the sacrifice of the Passover Lamb?"* God is doing it again! You are about to see something spectacular happen!

Christians have long looked for a great evangelism technique; yet, I've never heard anyone recommend Peter's approach here. Listen: *"Pilate called him*

innocent; but you said he was guilty!" "You reputed the holy one of God; you handed him over to be crucified..." "You lobbied for the Son of God to be killed in place of a murderer..." "Remember, you killed him; but God raised him from the dead!"

[And] *"The power that raised Jesus from the dead is the same power that healed this man."* [And] *"If you believe God changed this man, let me tell you about the changes God wants - needs - you to make in your life:"*

Peter is saying three things here about Jesus (we often miss these because we don't have a Jewish background)

1. Jesus is the **innocent servant** (3:13). This should send our minds to **Isaiah 53** one of the best Old Testament passages for understanding who Jesus was and why he died. Jesus was innocent; but His Father called him to bear the sins of many.
2. Jesus was the **Holy One, the Righteous/Just One** (3:14). Jesus displayed God-centeredness, pure integrity, and amazing love. "Holy" and "Righteous" echo more of Isaiah. So Peter is saying, "If you want to know about Jesus, check Exodus (where God freed his people) and Isaiah (where the suffering servant bears his people's sins and infirmities).
3. Jesus is 'the **author of life**' (3:15). Here, "author" means the one who initiates life. Jesus walks through death and comes out the other side with an abundant "life". They killed the "author of life," but God raised him up!

If you acknowledge Jesus is Messiah, it is time to **change** your ways. It is time to turn your face toward God and have him forgive you. It is time for God to pour out his refreshment and blessings on you. ("It's time to change your ways" is the same message as "Repent, and turn to God" which is the same message as "God has raised this Jesus from the dead" cf. 3:15, 19).

That was **John** the B's message; it was **Jesus'** message; it is the Church's message; it is the **Gospel** message.

She signed up for aerobics class. Instructor said, "Be sure to wear loose clothing when you come." She said, "If I had loose clothing, I wouldn't need to come."

Some things need to change. If we don't need to make any changes, we don't really need Jesus. What needs to **change** in our/your life?

First, we need to be **convicted** of our sin. Jesus said, (**John 16:8**) "When the Holy Spirit comes, he will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment."

I'm not the perfect parent; I haven't always been completely transparent with my spouse; I cut corners; I've talked about people behind their back; I can be

critical; I can be self-centered (and those are just the things I remember Marilyn mentioning). Yes, I am a sinner! (And yes, I'll be buying flowers again. . . probably at a grocery store).

Second, we need to be **crushed** (broken) by our sin - that is, be genuinely sorry/repentant about it (i.e. not just sorry we got caught, but deeply sorry we did it). Peter knows this mark first-hand. He messed up. The rooster crowed. Peter ran outside and wept bitterly. He's broken, crushed about his sin; he grieves/laments what he did.

Third, we need to **confess** our sins. This means we need to agree with God that it was wrong; that it dishonors God, dishonors others, and even dishonors ourselves. This means we really believe our sin was harmful and it ultimately cost Jesus his life. We must take personal ownership of our sin. God knows if our confession is genuine.

Fourth, we need to **change**. John the Baptist said: "*Prove by the way that you live that you have really turned from your sins and turned to God*" (**Matthew 3:8**). If we aren't serious about changing, our relationship with God will deteriorate. Following Jesus always requires change; and the best time is now.

We must "*repent and turn to God so that our sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*" (**3:19**). Repentance is not **optional**!

This is the harsh reality of the Gospel: there is no Good News without repentance. No forgiveness; no hope; no redemption; no eternal life. But thousands respond: "*Many who heard the message believed and the number of men grew to about five thousand*" (**4:4**).

One day God will **restore** all things. While that final day is quickly approaching, the time of refreshment is at hand. This refreshment is present in the teaching of scripture, in fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayer (sound familiar?). In these practices we taste a bit of heaven here on earth. The new world we seek is already available today for those who seriously **seek** it.

Everything God was doing through Abraham, Moses, Isaiah is now happening in Jesus! And you can be a part of it! Because of the resurrection anyone who turns from the life they're leading to having God lead their life can know the joy of **forgiveness**, being refreshed by God's mercy and love, and of discovering a new life in Jesus.

The Message of Jesus as Messiah/Rescuer meant trouble from the moment they proclaimed it. Luke writes (**4:2-3**) - "*The apostles were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead. [So] they seized Peter and John, and because it was evening they put them in jail until the next day.*"

This is the same threesome (Elders/Sanhedrin, Scribes, Chief Priests) (**Luke 22:66**) who tried and condemned Jesus. (The Sanhedrin is comprised of the

elders - wealthy, landowners, nobility, powerful; the Scribes were the scholars, the rabbis and the teachers; the Chief Priests were the religious leaders and the bureaucrats). With all their accumulated religious, political, and economic power here (there was no separation of church and state in those days), this is the same powerful and intimidating group Peter and the other disciples were terrified of and hid from in a locked room - just a few days before.

They are not happy. Why not? Isn't this great news! Not if you were one of the people who rejected and condemned Jesus. Not if you're in power and realize this group is trying to upstage you. So while they still seemingly "hold all the cards" they have Peter and John arrested.

The Sadducees, the elders and leaders in the Temple, strongly disapproved of the idea of "resurrection." (They laughed at the idea - as many do today!). They understood - as even few Christians do today - that resurrection is a radical, dangerous doctrine in our world. It is an attack on the status quo, and a threat to existing power structures.

The Resurrection declares that the living God is going to put everything right once and for all, will make everything **new** once and for all, is going to "restore all things," and will again turn the world **right side up**. (Those now in power understand they won't be in power in the new world God makes; that is, those who believe in resurrection are trouble for those currently in power).

What made these leaders so anxious and angry isn't just Peter's announcement that God raised Jesus from the dead, but they were proclaiming the "resurrection of the dead" (4:2). That is, not only was Jesus raised, but this is the sign that God is changing everything.

Then comes THE question: "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Peter - who only weeks before told three people with absolutely no influence or power that he didn't even know Jesus - is now asked a similar question by the rich and powerful.

4:8 - "Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit..." responds again. So everything is the same, yet everything is entirely different. Peter is now wholly filled with, inspired by, and yielded to the Spirit. The resurrection has taken effect in Peter's life.

But the question remains: Who did this?

THE COMPLETE ANSWER

Luke continues: 4:9-10 - "If we are being called to account today for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and asked how he was healed, [we'll tell you the truth]: It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." Oh, and just so we're clear...leaders...

"I too stand before you as a testimony to his [resurrection] power and healing"

"And if you've forgotten who that is, it is the same one you crucified; ring any bells!" (Go, Peter!)

"He is the same one who God raised from the dead; the same one who fulfilled the Psalmist's prophecy (118:22); the same one who can do it for you! Check him out!" (Actually he is no longer dead, so watch out!)

4:12 - *"Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."*

The word "salvation" used here often means restoring someone's physical health; so the immediate reference here is to the healed leper. **Jesus** did this; **only Jesus**, being fully God, can do something like this... And as Jesus ushers in his kingdom, it will happen over and over again.

But there is a double meaning here; it also refers to our soul's healing. Peter is saying that without Jesus' teaching, suffering, death, and resurrection, there is **no hope**. But because of his death and resurrection, **hope** can be ours.

Jesus did this. Jesus does this. He is going to continue to do it again and again until the whole world is changed. There is no other name!

4:13 - *"When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and took note that these men had been with Jesus."*

Ordinary people usually buckle in the face of earthly power and authority. They confront Peter and John, but this time Peter stands his ground. God is honored. The Sanhedrin is amazed. They acknowledged these men had been with Jesus. They had clarity; they had courage.

The leaders thought when they crucified Jesus they'd stopped this apparent nonsense and silenced his followers that went with him... Now they don't know what to do. They are the ones left speechless. What in the world is going on?

4:14 - *"Since they could see the man who had been healed standing there with them there was nothing they could say."*

It is incredibly hard to deny the Truth when it is visibly **standing** right in front of you. There is the beggar - right beside Peter and John - healed and saved and leaping! Yet, the leaders can't have them going around saying resurrection is happening, that Jesus is Messiah, and that his name is so powerful invoking it heals chronically ill people. That would undermine their kingdoms.

THE OTHER QUESTION

*What are we **going** to do with these men?* How do you shut a door when a

howling gale is already blowing through it? *The results of their relationship to Jesus are clear to everyone...we can't change that. But we need to keep this from spreading further so let's tell them not to talk about it anymore...*

These are powerful and influential people. They are accustomed to being obeyed. They say, "Leap." People say, "How high." They're now at a loss. They ask, "How shall we stop them?" They say, "I know, let's really scare them!" (Are they serious? They're acting like adults who put on a mask to scare three-year-old trick-or-treaters" Really?)

"We're going to let you go this time, but don't ever do it again"; they assumed they could scare the disciples: "Remember what we did to your Jesus!"

These leaders know this time is different. The people making this claim have already shown they are living by it, and that it has power, kingdom-power, healing power. It makes the lame walk, just like Jesus did. Paul said it, *"the kingdom of God is not about talk, it is about power"* (1 Corinthians 4:20).

Peter and John are no longer easily **scared** (Their life is no longer **their own**)(*To live their life, Paul will later say, is Christ; to die is even better!*). They not only believe in resurrection - they are living it!

4:19-20 - *Peter and John replied, 'Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God.' For we cannot help speaking about what we have. (Think about that!).*

Remember the Wizard in the Wizard of Oz (I talked about it a bit last week). The Wizard tries so hard to intimidate Dorothy and her three friends; the Cowardly Lion is so terrified he runs out through locked doors. But the curtain is ultimately pulled back and we see its not so intimidating - it's just this little guy in a booth. It's smoke and mirrors. There is nothing to be afraid of.

Peter, the former cowardly lion, has now been filled with a holy boldness. He comes to realize there is no force that can stop the irrepressible spread of the Gospel message - not persecution, not the threat of imprisonment, not even death...

Peter knows they can **threaten** him, lock him up, beat him, even put him to **death**; Peter knows Satan feigns power and tries to be intimidating; but since Jesus has overcome him, Satan is no longer anything but smoke and mirrors. Peter knows that is all they can do; he is no longer frightened. This is just a few men pretending to be more powerful than they are.

We also must realize there is no force that can stop the **irrepressible** spread of the **Gospel message** - nor should embarrassment, awkwardness, or even a sense of our fallibility. Jesus is alive. The resurrection is a reality! The Kingdom is coming!

YOUR ANSWER

These intimidating leaders let them go; they had little choice; they can't stop it!

4:21-22 - *"All the people were praising God..."* [The evidence was visible and conclusive:] *"The man was miraculously healed"*

In our quest to be a disciple of Jesus, are we focused on spreading His Resurrection Gospel? Are we making an effort to hang out with people who don't know Jesus? The intimidating leaders of the first century couldn't stop the disciples from boldly proclaiming Jesus is risen - why have we stopped?

The early church's strategy for **mission** is focused on **going, growing** and **blessing**. It was about developing relationships and sharing our lives with people who don't yet know Jesus; it's about healing, salvation, and the power to change (everything!). It's about making our trips to the grocery store, restaurant, barber and beautician - even to church - all missionary journeys. It is about keeping the main thing the main thing!

The first century disciples were willing to lay down their life for this message - it is still the only message of the church - twenty centuries later!

By Pastor Doug Kamstra on November 8, 2020
Covenant CRC
7171 Willard Ave SE
Grand Rapids, MI 49548
(616) 455-5120 | info@covenant-crc.org