Prayer for Boldness

Acts 4:23-31 Kimby Young

Romans 8:24-28 February 16, 2025

I continue to preach from lessons learned while teaching the book of Acts. Today’s scripture from Acts actually inspired this whole sermon series. In the chapter just before this one, Peter and John are arrested for preaching the gospel of Jesus Christ. It is not the first time they were arrested. It is not the last time they will be arrested. We are fortunate to live in a time and place where we can talk about Jesus and worship the way we feel led to worship. We are fortunate to be able to share what we believe and not face terrible consequences. But for the early church, there were often real world threats to faithfulness. And some places in the world, the challenge remains where Christians and other people of faith are not free to speak and worship as they believe. For the early church, they could get arrested. They could be beaten or even killed for speaking up about Jesus. They could lose their jobs or their property. They could lose their homes or even be kicked out of their own towns. There were consequences for following the way of Jesus Christ. And here’s the point of today’s sermon – they followed Jesus anyway. Even under threat, even from prison, even at the point of death, the disciples believed in Jesus and shared what they believed about God’s love in Jesus Christ.

At the beginning of today’s scripture from Acts, Peter and John are released from prison. They immediately go find the other believers. They gather with other faithful followers of Jesus – to share what happened, to give and to receive encouragement, and to pray. And here’s what jumped out at me when I first read this passage. They prayed for boldness.

I don’t know that I would have prayed that prayer. I might have prayed for comfort or for safety from persecution. I might have prayed that my family and friends remain safe. I might have prayed for escape from threat. I don’t know. But those first disciples didn’t pray to escape or get out of trouble. They prayed for more trouble. They prayed for God to help them speak with boldness. They prayed for God to lead them where they could preach again and maybe get arrested again. Or worse. They prayed not only for courage in facing whatever may come. They prayed for courage to go out and create challenging situations. For boldness, to put themselves in harms way so that others could hear about Jesus, and about God’s love for the world. They prayed for boldness. And look at the last verse. They got what they prayed for. Verse 31 says, “and they were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.”

You’ve heard that old saying, “be careful what you pray for”. You might just get it. These early disciples prayed for the power of the Holy Spirit to come upon them, to fill them, to strengthen them, to help them face whatever comes, to help them confront the evil of the world with the love of God. They prayed. And God gave them the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Prayer is a miraculous mysterious gift of God’s grace. It is something we practice but never perfect. It is something we will never fully understand. It is something that you don’t have to understand to be able to share. Prayer is opening ourselves to God – talking to God, listening to God. There is no right way to pray. Better said, there is no wrong way to pray. If you are open to God – you are praying.

Now there are patterns and disciplines and ways of praying that help us to connect with God. But it’s not a formula. There are not certain words to say, or ways to stand or hold our hands, or things to do that guarantee we will hear God. It’s not like magic to manipulate God into hearing us. Prayer is a relationship. It takes time and patience and practice. And even then, sometimes we don’t know exactly what happens.

Sometimes we do know. Sometimes we get answers. There have been times in my life when I absolutely know God heard me and answered my prayers, or I heard God and understood God’s direction. But I couldn’t tell you how or why it happened. I couldn’t duplicate results like a scientific experiment. I was just grateful – as any of us are who have felt God’s presence with us. I have also had times when I did not get what I wanted – and miraculously those times were just as clearly an answer from God – with love and grace for what I really needed, what was right according to God’s plan.

My best advice on prayer is just keep praying. Just keep talking to God. Just keep listening for God and looking for signs of God everywhere. Because when we pray, that doesn’t change God or make God listen to us. God always listens to us. Prayer changes me and you. Prayer helps me to hear God and receive God’s gifts. Prayer helps me to understand what is happening in my life and in the world around me, so that I can respond as God wills. Prayer reminds me that God is with me and God gives me what I need. So even when I don’t pray for boldness – God has given it to me anyway. God has made me stronger, and kinder, and more courageous, and more generous. God has prepared me for situations I didn’t even expect. And God has blessed me with other people to help me along this journey of life and faith.

So maybe I’m more like these first disciples than I thought. I know you are. What is the first thing they did when they were released from prison? They ran to be with the other believers. They gathered together – for comfort and courage and strength and support. They gathered to worship and to pray and to praise God. That is why we get together every single week in good times and bad. We gather when we are happy, when we are sad, when we struggle, when we feel brave. We gather to receive support and to give support to others. We come together to worship God and to be with other people who are worshipping God. We gather to receive the gifts of God and to feel the presence of God’s Holy Spirit moving among us. We gather to praise God. And God blesses us. God is with us. God gives us more than we even ask or imagine. God gives us boldness to live in the world, to follow Jesus Christ, and to love others as we have been loved by our gracious powerful God. Let us give thanks to God.