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Acts 4, 13, 1927 - 1930

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ACTS 4, 13,

The verse of Holy Writ which I have just read to you is one of those gems hidden in the sacred record which appear commonplace and ordinary at first glance, but begin to glow with divine truth and fire the more they are examined. Toward evening of the day before Peter and John had gone up to the temple and had found a lame beggar sitting at the Gate called the Beautiful. His miserable plea for alms Peter had answered with the famous words:

"Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have I give thee: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk." The joy of the beggar over his miraculous healing had attracted a crowd and Peter promptly seized the opportunity by collecting them in the porch of Solomon and preaching one of his vivid, powerful sermons there. But in the middle of his address he was interrupted by the approach of the priests, the captain of the temple guard and the leaders of the Sadducees; the ancient and sacred porch of Solomon was no place to preach this new doctrine of a crucified King and the resurrection of the dead. Despite the murmuring of the crowd they took Peter and John off to prison and, since it was evening, they were forced to stay there overnight.

Early the next morning they were led out to stand trial before all the pomp and power and splendor which Jerusalem could muster. What a dramatic contrast the courtroom of the High Priest saw on that morning! On the one side were the last representatives of an order which was rushing to its doom; there were the elders, the rulers and the scribes; there were Annas and Caiaphas who only a few short months

before had presided at another trial in the middle of the night. On the other side were Peter and John, a poor, unlearned, ignorant fishermen - but the representatives of a new dispensation which was destined to sweep the old into oblivion and destruction. Surely a dramatic contrast - and it reaches its climax in the words of our text: "And when they saw the boldness of Peter and John they took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." For the first time Annas and Caiaphas see the handwriting on the wall. A few months before they had sat strong and unmoved as they condemned Jesus of Nazareth to die; they had hammered the wavering Pilate into line; they had led the mob in the frenzied cry, "Crucify Him, crucify Him." And apparently they had won out; the blood of their victim had dripped into the dust of Calvary and His body had been laid away in a tomb. Of course, there had been rumors of His resurrection but they were based only on the reports of a few disciples maddened with grief.

But now what is this? Here are two of that man's disciples and in their eyes is that same glow of another world, that same boldness, that same calm defiance in the face of death. Nay more, one of them even says: "Be it known to you all that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye crucified and whom God raised from the dead, doth this man stand here before you whole." Even by him these words must have sounded like the crack of doom. What was this? Had they, after all, failed? Ah yes, they had failed and the realization swept over them with overwhelming force. Seated there on their thrones,

their rule a mere empty shell, their highpriesthood a mockery, they beheld the boldness of Peter and John and they knew that they had been with Jesus. They saw the handwriting on the wall, their plans had failed, this Jesus of Nazareth was living, living in these men who stood there so fearlessly and proclaimed His name to all who would hear. They knew they had failed; they could not kill these men as they had killed their leader - outside the courtroom the crowd was murmuring and never again would they be able to move the people to cry for blood. So after a hollow threat they released Peter and John. They had lost and their failure was written in the faces of these men who had been with Jesus.

That was one effect of the boldness of Peter and John. But this boldness carried wider and deeper implications; it was, in fact, merely the first manifestation of that true Christian boldness which has been the glory of the Christian Church for two thousand years, a boldness which is the Godgiven prerogative of every follower of Christ, a boldness which the Christian Church must have and hold also in these last days of sore distress if it is to carry out its divine mission in this world. To this True Christian Boldness I would therefore direct your attention this evening and consider:

I. Its Source.

II. Its Manifestation.

I.

"They beheld the boldness of Peter and John and took knowledge of them that they had been with Jesus." Clearly and unmistakeably our text presents the cause of John and Peter's boldness: They had been

with Jesus. What hidden depths of meaning lie in that sentence!

John and Peter had been with Jesus while He was here on earth. For three long years they had wandered with the Son of Man up and down the roads of Judea, on the hills of Galilee, on the plains of Samaria. They had been with Him when He performed his miracles; they had seen Him raise the dead, they had seen Him weep over sin-blinded and sinsick Jerusalem. More than that - Peter and John had been in that select group of three who saw His greatest glory and His deepest sorrow. They had been with Him at his transfiguration when He had showed them that He was the great I am that I am who was able to summon the giants of the Old Testament, Moses and Elijah; they had been with Him on that quiet night in the Garden when He drank the cup of God's anger over man's sin to the last bitter dregs. Yes, they had been with Jesus and perhaps only now they realized fully what a glorious privilege that companionship had been.

But they were still with Jesus. True, only a few weeks earlier He had ascended into heaven and a cloud had taken him away from their sight. But had He deserted them? Had He left them alone? Were they to go forth into a hostile world unaided and alone? No, every moment of their lives His glorious words were sounding in their memories: "Lo, I am with you always unto the end of the world"; every moment of their lives they were sustained and strengthened by the consciousness of His divine presence, guiding,

controlling and directing the triumphant march of the Gospel through the world. They lived in the presence of Jesus, they walked with Jesus, they knew nothing save Jesus and Him crucified. And, therefore, they were bold, therefore their whole lives were filled with the blare of trumpets and the sound of battle - they were soldiers fighting for and in the presence of the eternal King of Kings.

My friend, if the Church of Jesus Christ today is to accomplish its Godgiven mission in the world then it must recover that Apostolic boldness, that boldness which can only be found with Jesus. There is no other source of spiritual power; there is no other power which will take men from the kingdom of sin, despair and death and translate them into the eternal Kingdom of our God and Lord, our Savior Jesus Christ; there is no other name given under heaven whereby man may be saved, but Jesus only. A living vital faith in Christ and His redemption, a supreme faith in the merits of a divine Savior - these and these alone are the source of true power in the Church.

And the same is true of the individual. If we see Churches which seem to have no real courage for the work^{of God's Kingdom}, that are buried under a mass of organizations, Churches in which all the work of bringing souls to Christ is left to the pastor, Churches which resort to questionable methods to raise the necessary means for the spreading of God's kingdom, then we may be sure that we are beholding Churches whose individual members have forgotten to walk with Jesus. He, who comes to them in His word and sacraments, is no longer a living force in their

daily lives, their faith is a matter of dead routine, their Christianity is not worth the name. No chain is stronger than its weakest link - and no Church can be bold and strong if the individuals within that Church are not bold with a supreme conquering faith in Jesus. True Christian boldness - its source is the same today as it was 2000 years ago when Annas and Caiaphas recognized it in Peter and John - They had been with Jesus.

II.

But, you ask, what is this true Christian boldness which is so necessary for the life of the Church? How does it manifest itself? My friend, it manifests itself in a supreme, indomitable, invincible faith in the conquering power of Christ and His Gospel, it manifests itself in a defiant fearlessness in the face of the scorn and contempt of a sneering world; it manifests itself in a continual, living consciousness that there can be no defeat for God. Look at Peter and John. They are continually and forever aware of the fact that they have been bought with a price and that they are now kings and priests before God and their Father. And so they stand in that crowded courtroom, before the power of Annas and Caiaphas, in the face of death, strong and unafraid and they tell Annas and Caiaphas exactly what they do not want to hear: "Be it known to all of you that Jesus Christ of Nazareth whom ye crucified God hath raised from the dead." That was not diplomatic, that was not tactful - that was divinely-inspired, Godgiven Christian boldness manifesting

itself in fearless confession.

My friend, if you would know how true Christian boldness manifests itself, then read the pages of the history of the Church written in the blood of saints and martyrs and engraven by the hand of God. Look upon our Lord Jesus Himself! See him on that night in the upper room before He crossed the brook Kedron into the Garden of Gethsemane! The shadow of the Cross is upon Him. His foes are gathering outside. His little band of disciples is huddled together in fear of the approaching calamity. The darkness of hatred and sin is threatening to engulf all He had ever said and done. His enemies seem to be victorious. It is the hour of darkness. But Jesus calmly lifts His head and says: "Fear not, I have overcome the world." There can be no defeat for God!

Turn a few pages of history and you see the coliseum at Rome. Wild beasts are howling in their cages. The crowd yells for blood. The signal is given. The gates are open. The lions leap forward. Silence grips the crowd. There in the center of the arena a little group of people are kneeling in prayer. They rise to their feet. Their faces show no fear. As the lions come nearer they begin to sing. And as the claws of cruel beasts tear their flesh and their limbs asunder these men and women sing to their Savior and their King. True Christian boldness - there can be no defeat for God!

Pass over fifteen centuries of blood and warfare and you see Luther before the diet of Worms. There are the kings and princes and there are the bloodhounds of Rome thirsting for his blood. Before his mind's eye there rises the picture of John Huss

burning at the stake; he remembers that before this prince has broken their promises. Yet there he stands - calm and unafraid - and finally he says: "Here I stand, I cannot do otherwise, God help me Amen" - and in his words we hear that true Christian boldness - there can be no defeat for God.

Only fifteen years later we see Tyndale, the translator of the Bible into English, burning at the stake, the flames mounting up to consume his broken and writhing body. His enemies have destroyed his English New Testament; they have cursed him, starved him, exiled him. They have fought him with diabolical fury in the name of Jesus. And now they are burning him and in a few moments his old body will be a mass of charred embers. But he says confidently through the blaze: "O God, open the King of England's eyes." True. Christian boldness - there can be no defeat for God.

Come down to comparatively recent times and see the pioneers of our own Synod travel hundreds of miles through trackless wilderness, enduring the heat of summer and the cold of winter, offering up their very lives for the sake of bringing the Gospel to hungry souls in the lonely outposts of civilization. They face the hostility of established churches undaunted. They laugh at hunger and cold. They endure the sneers of a hostile world. They push on and on, leaders in the triumphant march of the Gospel, soldiers of Christ. True Christian boldness - there can be no defeat for God.

There, my friend, you have some pictures of true Christian boldness manifesting itself in the motto written with letters of flame into the history of the Church, "There can be no defeat for God." Is it not true that we have lost the power to understand these heroes of the Church? We shrug our shoulders and say: These men lived in other times and other conditions - nothing like that is needed today. If one of them were to appear in America today he would probably be considered a little mad. Oh friend, if they were mad, then would to God we had more of that madness today. But they were not mad - theirs was merely an indomitable, courageous faith in the conquering power of God. They had been with Jesus and they showed that in every moment of their lives. They did not carefully and cautiously measure their chances for success; they never heard of the word "impossible"; they never doubted the invincibility of God's cause. And so they became heroes in the Church of God, men whose names ring down through the centuries among those who have helped the Church march through the ages confident of her strength, sure of her divinely-appointed destiny, ever aware of her final glorious consummation.

My friend, let us pray that this true Christian boldness will manifest itself also among us more and more. Living in an age when science and invention have annihilated time and space our opportunities for confessing Christ boldly and fearlessly are boundless. We shall not be called upon to die for our faith, but we are called upon to bring others to Christ by boldly confessing our faith. That takes courage - but it is the most

Peter

beautiful, the most Godpleasing work in the world. It brings immortal souls to the foot of the Cross. A famous American preacher

Bloomington

Chicago

Peoria

Springfield

Quincy

Baltimore

Orange (Illustrated)

Petersburg

Orbits of Christianity

Especially, do they say, has it, but its appeal to youth.

But to some extent, that is true. Youth has become weary of

its traditional teaching, it has turned to a new, more modern, out-of-date materialism.

It has forgotten that there is a purpose in its life.

It is ^{to walk} a living, vital, reality. Christ, Paul, Coe.

Christ, Paul, Coe.