



Why Acts 4:20 is One of My Favorite Bible Verses

Fr. Charles Erlandson

Acts 4:13-22

"We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard."

This is my favorite verse in the Bible. Yes, yes. I know that I've said in the past that it was Psalm 27:4, I mean Ephesians 2:6, er uh Matthew 16:24. No, no – I mean 2 Corinthians 4:7 and 2 Corinthians 12:9.

Alright, alright! Would you believe that Acts 4:20 is my favorite verse today?

I really do like this verse. I've been found to quote it in an amazing number of contexts.

To understand why I like it so much, I'll have to explain to you the situation Peter and John found themselves in. There they were, minding their own business, going to the Temple to pray at the ninth hour. What could possibly happen when you go to the house of the Lord to pray and worship Him with His people?

On their way in, they encounter a lame man who asked for alms. So they stopped and gave him the greatest alms of all: Jesus Christ, disguised in the form of physical healing. On that day, the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful became truly beautiful to him. As always, the Holy Spirit not only worked through them but spoke through them, and they spoke the Name that Must Not be Spoken: Jesus Christ. For healing someone and preaching Jesus Christ, they were arrested and put on trial.

We pick up the story in today's lesson and find our heroes standing before the bad guys. What will the bad guys say or do to what Jesus Christ has said and done through Peter and John? They severely threatened them, commanding them not to speak at all or teach in the name of Jesus.

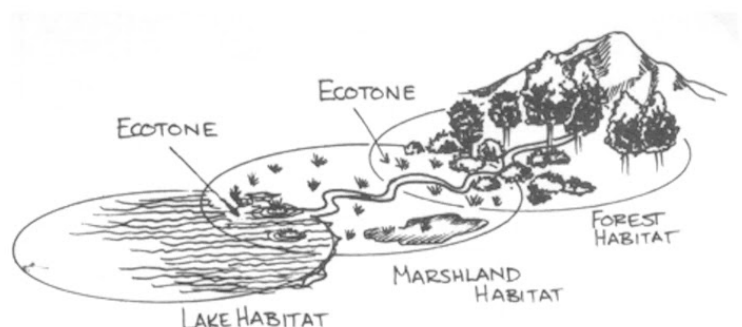
Knowing that they must obey those God has put in charge, and being secretly afraid for fear of the Jews, they go back meekly to their homes and their former fishing jobs, the merry band of apostles and disciples disbands, and the book of Acts and the gospel of salvation all go up in a Poof! of smoke, never to be heard from again. The Bible never gets written, Fr. Charles never writes Give Us This Day, and you are all dismissed for recess to go out and play.

Actually, isn't that the way the story ends way too much of the time in our lives? If you or I were Peter and John, how would this story have ended?

Ecotone

An ecotone is a zone of junction or a transition area between two biomes

eco: Greek οἶκος (oikos),
"house/dwelling"
+
-tone from the Greek τόνος
(tonos), "tension"



Digging Deeper

10/16/22

Of course, it's what Peter and John say that has now become my latest, greatest, favorite Bible verse. What do they say? "Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. For we cannot but speak of the things which we have seen and heard."

Why do I like this verse so much? Because these uneducated, untrained men had the kind of courage that inspires me. I sit and fret about my little problems, and then I read about the faith and courage of Peter and John.

How are they able to have such fearless courage? The good news is that they're no better than me. One of them was at heart a big fat coward who denied his Lord 3 times. I often (too often) see myself as Peter on Good Friday, fearful and denying the power of the Lord.

But I wish to see myself today as Peter before the Jewish council. How can I? In and of himself, Peter was really no better than me. By himself, he didn't "get it," and by himself he denied his Master or was holed up in the upper room for fear of the Jews. But filled with the Spirit who is the Encourager, he is filled with courage. The good news is that I have this same Spirit of courage. The question is do I have the faith to receive Him? And so I'm here to tell you (and myself – Drat! I've forgotten the first rule of the preacher or teacher which is that you always get hit first with the truth you're teaching) that you should be fearless and courageous in your proclamation of Christ as were Peter and John. But I'm not going to lecture you or bully you (or myself) into having to speak the Name that Must be Spoken. The truth is, that you should be compelled to speak the Name of Jesus Christ and to face whatever consequences society has in store for you for having spoken it. But you shouldn't be compelled by me, or by anyone outside yourself. You should be compelled to speak the Name of Jesus and live it courageously because, like the apostles, you cannot help but speak His Name. Filled with the Holy Spirit, you should be compelled to speak of the things you have seen and heard.

See? It comes back to Acts 1:1, doesn't it, the idea that Jesus Christ, through His Spirit in His Body, is continuing to do and teach the things He began to while He was on the earth in the flesh.

Here, then, is the secret to being like Peter and John: having been in the presence of Christ, we are filled with the Holy Spirit to courageously do His will here on earth. There's another verse I want to throw into the spiritual diet we're eating today, and that is verse 13: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and unlearned men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus."

Where does the compelling force to go out and turn the world upside down come from? It comes from having been with Jesus. Why is it that Peter and John can't help but speak about Jesus Christ and what they have heard and seen Him do? It's precisely because they have seen what He's said and done. And what is required for us to see what He's saying and doing is for us to spend time in His presence.

Where do we get the courage to be a Martha and go out and be activists for Jesus Christ? It's by first being Marys and sitting at Jesus' feet.

If we put verses 13 and 20 together and place them together into our lives, we might hear something like this: "Having been with Jesus, they could not but speak of the things which they had seen and heard Jesus do."

If you have heard and seen Jesus Christ recently, then you should speak and act in His Name.

And if you have not heard or seen Jesus Christ recently, then maybe it's time you went and found Him, and having found Him, sat worshiping at His feet.

Prayer: O Lord God, who made the heavens and earth and the sea and all that is in them, grant to Your servants that they may diligently seek and find Your Son today, and, having found Him may worship You. Having worshiped You, may they with all boldness speak Your word and perform signs and wonders through the Name of Your holy Son Jesus. Amen.

Points for Meditation:

Where have I seen or heard Jesus Christ in my life recently?

What might I do to better see or hear Him?

In what ways is He calling me to be more courageous in acting or speaking in His Name?

Resolution: I resolve to set aside extra time today to spend in Jesus' presence, listening especially for what He would have me to do.