

The Weekly Word

March 4-10, 2019

Welcome to March and to Lent which begins on Wednesday. Happy reading...
Grace and Peace, Bill

To hear the Bible read click this link... <http://www.biblegateway.com/resources/audio/>.

Monday, March 4: Acts 2- Grab hold of the moment...

I love the way Peter focuses everything on Jesus. "*Fellow Israelites, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know* (22). The context allows him to do this. It is 50 days after Jesus' death and resurrection. Very likely people are still buzzing with talk about this Jesus. Peter seizes the moment and witnesses.

The Lord God set up this moment. I struggle to picture the setup. The disciples are in one place and the house they are in is filled with roaring wind and tongues of fire. I can't quite get hold of how a crowd of thousands forms. Somehow the experience must have spilled out into the streets. However God orchestrated all this, it must have been a pretty big commotion to draw that many people at 9:00 am.

Part of the beauty of the story is that Peter grabs hold of the moment and testifies to Jesus. He plays to their common knowledge and heritage. Heritage, by quoting Joel, a Jewish prophet and knowledge describing the happenings of the Jesus' death and resurrection. *This man was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him* (23-24).

Interestingly, Peter frames the happenings in 'you' terms. Again, clearly the events of Jesus' death and resurrection continue to live in the consciousness of the people in and around Jerusalem.

Returning to my main observation, Peter seizes the moment and testifies to Jesus. Peter's example convicts me. I don't think I am as adept at seizing the moment to testify to Jesus. I wonder... why that might be. What is it in my life that mutes boldness?

- Am I fearful of what people will think of me?
- Am I unsure that I can explain things well so people will understand?
- Is it because I am not a good conversationalist so I don't know how to keep a conversation going?

Each of these is a possibility. Maybe it is a bit of each, creating a cocktail of timidity at least compared to Peter.

Now the question is...Lord where would You have me grow?

Lord Jesus, I want to grow in this area of my life. Please show me strategies and skills that will help me grow to be a better witness to Your saving love. In Your name Jesus I pray. Amen.

Tuesday, March 5: Acts 3- Come home to God...

In the center of Peter's words to the onlookers gathering after the healing miracle is an invitation to repent. Verse 19: *Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord...*

God is not interested in blame as much as He is interested in people coming home and back into relationship with Him through faith in Jesus Christ. Peter directs the people to faith in Jesus. It is Jesus who healed the lame man and it is Jesus –that is faith in Jesus –who offers us the doorway forgiveness of sins *that times of refreshing may come from the Lord.*

I decided to personalize what I just noted.

Forgiveness of sins... I am all too human; my life is dotted with sin. My words have hurt people. My actions have not helped people. I have taken the Lord's name in vein. My list is long. And yet, through Jesus, I have been washed clean and I am viewed as sinless by God the Father. This in no way condones sin or give license for sinning. I am so grateful to the Lord for the gift of forgiveness.

Time of refreshing... how many times has the Lord refreshed me? I certainly could not count the times. Times when God poured into me. Times when the Lord saw me through a rough patch, giving me energy and grace to thrive. Times when the Lord healed my sick body and gave me energy.

I know forgiveness from God and times of refreshing. Peter's words are not simply nice platitudes, they are truth. They are real. And they are just as real today as they were when Peter spoke them.

If you haven't experienced these realities then, like Peter, I invite you to repent and put your faith in Jesus so that you can.

Lord God, I thank you for the reality of Your good gifts that come alive through faith in Jesus. I pray that people all over the world will experience the blessings that come with faith in Jesus. In Jesus' name I pray. Amen.

Wednesday, March 6: Acts 4- Help me to be more bold...

As I sat and pondered this chapter and the unfolding story, I marvel at how 'natural' witness and proclamation seems for Peter and the crew. As situations present themselves he just seems to know how to engage the people present. Today it is the boldness to talk back to the religious elite, proclaiming Jesus even though the leaders commanded them not to do so. Yesterday it was talking to the crowds after the healing of the lame man and the day before that it was his Pentecost witness. Three very different situations yet, in each Peter seemed to have the right words to reach the hearts of the people.

I put 'natural' in quotes because I have read the Gospels where Peter did not show a natural inclination to speak well. Yes, Peter was often one who spoke, but what he said, well, that often left much to be desired.

The change clearly comes at Pentecost.

Still I marvel at how naturally and appropriately Peter speaks in various situations. And when he senses an opening, he inserts the story of Jesus in such a way that people are drawn to him. 3000 on Pentecost and now 5000 men (4), which could be 15,000 people in total.

Lord, my prayer is for the 'naturalness' of Peter to flow in me as well. I pray that I can sense an opening and have the words to speak that testify to Jesus in a way that people are drawn to faith. I pray this in Jesu's name. Amen.

Thursday, March 7: Acts 5- Jealousy...

I don't think jealousy is something we humans aspire to; it is, however, a beastly character trait that can and does well up in the best of us.

According to Luke, jealousy was the spark that ignited the religious leaders against the apostles. *Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.*

That is a pretty sad statement. It was not religious purity, zeal for the Lord or His Torah. It was not defending their honor or calling out sin. It was jealousy that sparked the apostles' arrest.

The paragraph immediately before this sentence shows the apostles being God's agents of many healings (16). People were so moved that they would put invalids in the street in the hopes that Peter's shadow would pass over them. God's power was on display for all to see. It is against this backdrop that Luke writes: *Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.*

A prominence shift was occurring and the Jewish religious leaders didn't like where things were headed. And jealousy snaked its way into the story and bad things started happening.

Jealousy is like that...

And jealousy is just as prevalent today. My thoughts slowly turn toward self and an examination of jealousy in my life. Wherever I see its ugly head rearing up, I need to cut it off as soon as I see it. Jealousy never leads to good, it undermines the work of God in people and organizations.

Lord, I am all too human. Please give me grace and strength to defeat jealousy and its' cousins, envy and comparison, in every aspect of my life. I pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

Friday, March 8: Acts 6- God has things for me to do...

Two thoughts strike me.

First, Stephen, a food delivery guy, *performed great wonders and signs among the people* (8b). This is the first notation of someone other than apostles doing signs and wonders. And it made me realize that you don't have to be the Top Dog to accomplish great things for God. Anyone in the course of life and calling has the power of God available as the Lord leads. God will use all of us to touch His world for His namesake.

Stephen reminds me that God has things for me to do. How blessed I am (we are) to be part of God's family living and showing His love to a world that so desperately needs LOVE.

Two, the Jews needed to resort to lies and trumped up charges to take Stephen out. When we are doing things for God, loving people and showing God's love, some people will oppose us. And even when we are living above reproach they may concoct stories against us. So be it. They did that to Jesus and they might do that against us. As frustrating and disappointing as this may be, God is not thwarted.

We, like Stephen, may even be convicted in a human court, but God will shine His light through us. Ours is to hold on to faith and live for Jesus. If bad things happen to us for doing God's will, God will be with us. As a speaker I heard recently said, "I have read the end of the book, God wins."

Stick with Jesus and remain on the winning side.

God is reminding me that I am only responsible for myself and my life. I need to guard my life and live as a person of integrity. Should others come after me with lies, remain faithful to Jesus...

Lord Jesus, here I am, send me, use me, use all of me. Show me people to serve, injustices to take on, people to witness to. Use me for Your honor and glory. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Saturday, March 9: Acts 7- One link in a chain...

There is a small detail as Stephen's story winds down that sets up the rest of the book of Acts. It is the presence of Saul. Luke tells us that as they dragged Stephen to be stoned, *the witnesses laid their coats at the feet of a young man named Saul* (58b).

This is a pretty infamous introduction to a man who is arguably the most important Christian leader in history. Saul was approving of Stephen's death. Saul was an enemy of the church.

What happened to change him?

We will have to wait until chapter 9 for that story. Still I believe this chapter holds one of the keys to Saul's eventual transformation. Verse 60 goes on to say, *Then he [Stephen] fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.*

Stephen forgave Saul and his murderers. My gut tells me that this was a major moment in Saul's spiritual life. Stephen's prayers for him opened the flow of heaven to Saul. There are no accidents in the Bible. These two elements of the story, I have to believe, were part of God's preparation for the call of Saul.

Where does this musing take me?

One, simple faithful actions -like forgiving someone- can and do have life long effects. I may never know how an interaction with someone might open the door to God's work in their life.

Two, my life and actions are part of a chain of events God uses to bring people to Himself. Sometimes I am an early link in the chain and in fact I may never know who God has used me to touch with His grace. Other times I may be a later link or the last link in the chain in a person's coming to faith. In these cases I may have a sense of the part I played in their coming to faith. Either way, my role is to be faithful and allow God to do His thing through me.

If I am correct about the role of Stephen's prayer and Saul's ultimate conversion, then that simple prayer is likely Stephen's greatest 'good deed.'

Wow, a prayer I pray, love I show tomorrow might have greatest faith impact of anything I do in my life. Only God knows for certain.

My take away... live faithfully in every moment and allow God to be in charge of the 'results.'

Lord, I offer You today and all of my todays. May my life bring honor to Your name and point people to You. I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.

Sunday, March 10, 2019, Sunday Worship

If any of my thoughts or the Bible readings spark questions send an email reply and I will do my best to answer all questions from people on the list... I will answer personal questions privately; general questions will be answered in a subsequent email installment.

If you are reading along with me from the Living Hope website you can send questions or request being placed on the weekly email list by emailing Lisa at office@LivingHopeCT.org.

Click here for a link to my sermons on the web. Sermons are generally posted within 2 days.