

This morning as we consider the lessons before us, we are referred to as **“People of God,” “Children of God,”** and **“Members of God’s Flock.”** These different terms remind us of the **unity that we have as members of God’s family** but our lessons also remind us that **the world will try to divide us and destroy us.**

The Good News is that we are safe in God’s hands. We can take our concerns to him in prayer and he promises to hear and answer our prayers. Let’s begin with our 1st lesson and see how that is true for us as, **“People of God.”**

First Lesson - Acts 4:23-31

²³ On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵ You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’ ²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. ²⁸ They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. ²⁹ Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. ³⁰ Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹ After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly. **This is God’s Word.**

A few weeks ago we heard how Peter and John had healed a man who was crippled and when asked, they pointed to Jesus as the one who gave them the power to heal this man. The crowd was amazed at the words of Peter and John but the Pharisees and leaders of the church were greatly disturbed and had Peter and John thrown into prison.

These church leaders wanted to stop them from preaching but they knew the people would riot if they tried to harm them in any way so they commanded Peter and John not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John replied, **“We can’t help speaking about what we have seen and heard.”** (Acts 4:20).

They were released and Luke tells us, **“On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them.”** Peter and John were people of God and went to be with people of God. They wanted to assure everyone that they were okay and they gathered so as to encourage one another.

This all happened probably within the 1st year after Jesus ascended into heaven. The picture of Jesus suffering on the cross to pay for the sins of the world was still fresh in everyone’s mind and then there was the good news of the resurrection. Jesus is alive! Our sins have been paid for and he has removed the sting of death. The disciples shared the Good News whenever they could and the Holy Spirit worked through the Word to bring thousands to faith.

Even though the early Christian church was persecuted they flourished because they had a message they had to share and they supported one another. On this day, as Peter and John gathered with God's People, they all joined in prayer.

First, they acknowledged the greatness of God, **“Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”** Then they noted how God had prophesied about these attacks –not only attacks on Christ but on Christians as well. As they prayed they quoted from Psalm 2 and talked about the fulfillment of those words, **“You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ”“Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? ²⁶ The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’ ²⁷ Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.”** A grim reminder that God's People – Christians – will always be under attack from the world who rejects Jesus.

So they asked for courage and help from God, **“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.”** We know their prayer was heard and answered because, **“After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”**

The challenges we face on a regular basis remind us that we are at war with Satan and the influences of the world too. In the public arena Christians are challenged whenever they stand up for what God's Word says. Whether that's supporting creation over evolution or recognizing the baby in the womb as a real person or defining marriage as a union between one man and one woman. The influence of the world is to be tolerant and to accept everything the world is promoting. If you speak against whatever the world is pushing, watch out – the response can be severe.

So we are tempted to stay quiet rather than to speak out. Sometimes we follow the command of the Pharisees and Jewish leaders who didn't care about God, and we keep quiet. Sometimes we speak up and are laughed at or ridiculed or even worse, but it is important for us to remember that Christ overcame Satan for us on the cross by paying for our sins. Satan would like to think he still has power over us but all we have to do is point to Jesus and he has to flee.

May we pray with courage like those early Christians and ask that God will help us to resist the influences all around us that would try to lead us away from our God and his Word. May we stand strong as people of God, encouraging one another and praying with and for one another and while God may not send an earthquake to acknowledge our prayers, may we still rejoice because God's promise is that he hears the prayers of his people and answers them. Amen.