

April 25, 2021

Acts 4: 5-13

Rev. Larry Brown - Powell United Methodist Church

“There’s Power in the Name”

Our early service this morning included the confirmation of youth who have prepared throughout the past months to step into full membership with the church. Confirmation is when we recognize that a young person has reached the age when he or she begins to make their own decisions about what is important to them. We know that as young people mature, choices are made about what they value and where they will place their loyalties. It is out of that context that I want to lift up a question I asked our confirmands earlier today. In the midst of the confirmation liturgy I asked, “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord, in union with the church which Christ has opened to people of all ages, nations, and races?” I was confirmed in 1970 in the congregation my dad was serving as pastor. I don’t remember much about it but somewhere in the collection of old photos that highlight significant events in my life there is a picture of my confirmation class sitting along the steps of the sanctuary. We say a picture is worth a thousand words and I wanted to show you that picture today, but I couldn’t put my hands on it, so I’ll describe it for you. All of us being confirmed were 12 or 13 years of age. Back in the day, you got dressed up in what was called “your Sunday best.” I was on the far side of one row with my shirt and tie, wearing black rimmed glasses, sporting a goofy smile, which showed a silver capped tooth that came after an unfortunate backyard football injury. [Just as an aside: it’s a good life lesson to always wear your helmet and to be sure the chin strap is fastened!] I describe my smile as goofy because it was and I’m pretty sure that is what I was going for. The way the camera caught the look on my face that day it is likely I was not as serious as I should have been. In fact, I’m not sure, at age 12, I would have known what to do with the question, “Do you confess Jesus Christ as your Savior, put your whole trust in his grace, and promise to serve him as your Lord...” Of course, what’s even more relevant is to wonder whether you or I have any better handle on answering that question now? Confirmation Sunday in the lives of our young people is an opportunity for us to confirm our faith. Do we trust in the grace Christ offers us and do we promise to serve him as our Lord?

When it comes to living out our Christian faith we know actions speak louder than words. It’s one thing to come together Sunday mornings for worship and another thing entirely to live in a way that trusts Christ’s grace and serves him as Lord. We’ve read from the book of Acts today, remembering that the full title of this section of the bible is “The Acts of the Apostles”. Written by the same author who gives us the Gospel of Luke, “The Acts of the Apostles” are the evidence that the early followers of Jesus lived into their commitment to serve Jesus and to acknowledge his authority and power in their lives. In the story we’ve read today, Peter and John have been arrested. Their alleged crime was sharing the compassion and healing of Christ with others. That’s right, their witness to the authority of God in the world threatened those who were in power, and they were thrown in jail. Peter and John’s offense centered around a man who had not been able to walk since birth. Each day, this man lay at the gate to the temple begging for money. When Peter and John happened by, the man cried out to them for mercy. Peter said, “I have no gold or silver but I will give you what I possess.” And then Peter extended his hand and commanded the man to stand up and walk in the name of Jesus, and the man did. Everyone was astonished and Peter made it clear the healing was because of Jesus, because of the power that flows from God through him and to us, a power that overcomes death. Peter and John, and the others involved in the mission of the early church, trusted in the power of God. This threatened those who were in positions of authority in the world. Peter and John faced that confrontation straight on. They stood firm. Jesus was their Lord. Compassion and healing in Jesus’ name could not be stopped. We are part of that same movement, which has been our focus since our celebration of Easter a few weeks ago. Christ lives so that the mission of Christ will live in our lives and world.

I couldn’t escape the irony this past week that as I reflected on the importance of the court scene involving Peter and John the world awaited the verdict in the Derek Chauvin case. By now we know the result, guilty on all counts. This case has been important because it points beyond just the details that surround the death of George Floyd. For many, the verdict connects to our larger struggle to find more merciful and just ways of ordering a society that includes all people. The case brought against Peter and John was about a bigger issue than just their act of compassion toward the man who couldn’t walk. They were giving witness to the power of God in the world. That kind of boldness in our faith is included in our call to follow Jesus. When people wonder why the church is concerned about the issues of race and justice, it’s because we have said “yes” to Jesus as our Lord. When we are involved in ministries that support those who are returning to our communities from prison it’s more than just kindness that motivates us. We care and are supportive because Jesus is Lord. When we champion systems that undergird the healing of those who have mental illness we do it because the lordship of Jesus Christ in our lives makes it important. The church grapples with issues related to human sexuality and inclusion not because of some political agenda but because we have promised to serve God, who opens the community of faith to all people. Jesus

is Lord and there is power in that name, and when we acknowledge the authority of Christ in our lives his grace is not only a gift received by us but a blessing shared by us to all who are created and loved by God.

Do you promise to fully trust the grace of Jesus Christ and serve as your Lord? What a joy to celebrate with our confirmands today. It is good to recognize what God is doing in their lives. Now, let us be confirmed in this faith, that God will make us bold to love others in Christ's name. Amen.