

FROM COWARDS TO CO-WORKERS – Part II**Acts 2****(Read Acts 2:37-47)**

Intro: Sometimes the best sermons wouldn't necessarily be considered sermons at all. They don't have three points with an illustration and a poem, and certainly they have no PowerPoint. They most often aren't delivered by a powerful speaker. Several weeks ago our brother and fellow ABCer who often joins us on ZOOM from Zambia, Oswald, preached for us. He is very close to finishing his studies in preparation for ministry and he just completed a term that included a homiletics class – which is a big word for “preaching class”. He was taught exactly as I was in college and seminary – a sermon should be about 20 minutes long. And his message to us was 23 minutes – which is really good for an African. You've probably noticed that my sermons have stretched over the years and now a wax on for 30 to 40 minutes. This is okay if the point gets across.

But the best sermons are often only a few words long and delivered by the most unlikely preacher.

- Our young friend Becky taught me how I needed to know when a joke is not a joke. (Tell about her dad's major surgery for an enlarged heart)
- Bradley was a little boy who was born with serious birth defects that ensured he would not live past the age of 10, if that long. His parents loved and ministered to this little boy who was never able to express anything in return. He was an integral part of our church family at Conoy and we all took it hard when Bradley passed away in the late 1990s. Bradley's little brother Brent seemed mature beyond his 5 or 6 years when Bradley died, but even a mature little boy gets rambunctious at visiting hours lasting over three hours as people paraded by to pay respects to Bradley and to offer condolences to his grieving parents. So I took Brent to my office which was in the adjoining room and we played video games on my computer. (Tell about Dr. Miller coming to see Brent). Just those two words, spoken with such compassion were a sermon I've never forgotten.

So the sermon Peter preached here in Acts 2 (we covered it last week), was not exactly the kind of sermon we hear today. It was Peter's first of many, and his scripture references and illustrations probably seem a little strange to us. But to the people who heard him, knowing what they knew about scripture and therefore eagerly waiting for a Messiah, but at the same time very uneasy about the claim Peter had made that they had crucified that very Messiah, the sermon hit them like a ton of bricks and they were cut to the quick. Albert Winn points out “*suddenly they saw themselves guilty of the world's most enormous crime. The end and the judgment of God stared them in the face.*” This sermon, simple as it was, unusual by our standards, terrified them. Not unlike the cowardly disciples on the night Jesus died on the cross – extremely aware of their vulnerability.

But, as we saw last week, and as we continue this week, we know that God transforms cowards into co-workers. Instead of melting into sniveling heaps, and sensing that the end of the sermon was an invitation to hope – Peter's listeners urgently asked, “*Brothers, what shall we do?*” Acts 2:37b and his answer was simple and effective and it precipitated one of the most awesome days in the history of God's people. So let's look at it and see how God transforms cowards into co-workers.

First, look at Peter's . . .

Powerful imperatives

- **REPENT** - this does not mean be sorry for what you've done, it means change your mind. Get a new sense of values. Reverse your direction. Turn from your sins. In other words, repent. Turn your back on your sins and change the way you think. Turn to God. In their study on Acts, Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantze rightly say that “*Repenting is not enough. We must also turn to God, who will forgive our sins and save us because of Christ's death and resurrection.*” No one is exempt. There were no exceptions in Peter's powerful altar call. Repentance is required of everyone. And then. . .
- **BE BAPTIZED IN THE NAME OF JESUS CHRIST** - this was something new. Jesus himself was baptized by John, but had not made baptism a condition of discipleship. Yet from the day of Pentecost on, baptism became the way the inward change by a work of God's grace was represented by an outward act. It's a visible sign of washing away corruption, of being dead to sin, buried and then resurrected. This kind of baptism is a sign that someone has repented and turned to God. Baptism doesn't result in forgiveness – it *IS* the result of forgiveness.
 - And what follows is the gift of the Holy Spirit. The step of turning away from sin and the obedience of being baptized, enabled the believers to receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is the promise of Pentecost – the Holy Spirit is a gift from God given to all who believe. And the Spirit is necessary to have the power to . . .
- **SAVE YOURSELF FROM THIS CROOKED GENERATION** – leave the old man-made ways and be a new creation. That admonition still works for us today—maybe more so. Repentance means we don't dabble in the corrupt things of our surrounding culture.
- The result was nothing less than amazing . . .

What an incredible beginning to the church!

- One commentator humorously and yet accurately points out that from this motley crowd arose the primitive Church. On the day of Pentecost more than 3,000 people believed in Christ and were baptized in water and received the Holy Spirit. The Body of Christ grew by **THREE THOUSAND PEOPLE!**
- And look at the characteristics of these new Christ Followers, compliments of Bickel and Jantze:
 - They were learners, which is the very meaning of disciple. If you are a disciple, you are learning. So they did as they devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles.
 - They also had fellowship. F. F. Bruce writes, “*From the teaching of the apostles these new believers stepped up into fellowship with them, because when we are joined to Christ we become one with all who are his.*” From cowards to co-

workers to co-fellowshippers. I have to say it again, it's right here in the Bible, the people of God are made for community and we need to do at the first church did and meet together regularly to strengthen one another.

- They were people of prayer. This was central to their growth and development and nothing has changed. Prayer is imperative! And notice it says they broke bread and prayed together. This is a reference to Communion and the fact that they continued Jesus' admonition to obey him with a Lord's Supper of their own.
- They were in awe of God. There was a deep reverence for him and what he had done for them. They had witnessed wonderful things at Pentecost and they knew from first-hand experience that God is an awesome God. And it went on,
- They witnessed signs and wonders. They had a sense of expectation and were not disappointed. Missionary William Carey famously said, "*Expect great things from God, attempt great things for God.*" That's the kind of people these early believers were.
- They shared with one another. They broke bread in one another's homes and made sure all were cared for. The early church was defined by people who took care of each other. They had everything in common. The Spanish expression "Mi casa es su casa." (literally, "My house is your house.") was very much the attitude of these new believers. No one had need. People were alert to the needs and cares of one another. This is tough for independent Americans to contemplate – but it's real and it's necessary.
- They worshiped the Lord together. They met on the Temple grounds and reveled in corporate worship. David sang: *Better is one day in your courts than a thousand elsewhere* Psalm 84:10 (NIV) and it may have been one of the songs they sang together, but it was certainly their attitude, because that's the way these believers felt about worship.
- They were joyful. The natural result of transformation and delirious worship was the joy of the Lord that filled their lives and their fellowship.
- They were generous. They shared selflessly and gave the without reserve. One commentator wrote, "*Nothing is worse than a stingy Christian.*" So true! When we think about all God has done for us, we want to do things for others.
- They had respect for others and they had the favor of other in return. When we are living out our lives before God and in the power of the Holy Spirit, people will notice and wonder what we have. And even desire what we have. There is no guarantee that we will be free of strife or persecution, but that does not mean we do anything less than treat all with respect and civility and love them with the love of the Lord. At best they will want it for themselves and join our number, or at worst we will have loved and respected in a way that reflects the way of Christ. It's a win-win situation.

Conclusion: With all these this it's no wonder the church grew!

With just one sermon and in a just a few hours 3,000 souls were added to the Kingdom. In just a few days, weeks, and months, thousands more were added to their number. The world was turned upside down and the Kingdom grew. From a few dozen cowering disciples to thousands of Spirit-filled co-workers. The church grew exponentially as people repented, were baptized, and received the Holy Spirit. They began the overthrow of a corrupt society in that generation. Let's take up the Pentecostal call and do the same in our generation. Let's never be cowards ever again, let's be co-workers with Christ. Amen.