

April 22, 2018
Acts 4:5-11

St. Paul UMC, Omaha
"By the Name of Jesus"

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She is a lovely young lady. Attractive, intelligent and possessing well defined personal and career goals. She is seemingly a wonderful prospect as a marriage partner as well. Yet, on the other hand, although you may have some good looks you are mainly driven by your hormones and your insecurity needs that thirst for affirmation. She fulfills those needs for you but that does not make you the best marriage partner right now. You have some maturing to do before you are ready for marriage.

Although those words were never spoken I believe that was some of the thoughts in my parents' mind as I announced to them at the age of 20, between my sophomore and junior year in college, that I was going to propose to Jane. We met at the beginning of our freshman year at Drake and started dating the following spring. My parents knew Jane pretty well since she had come to Omaha to visit a number of times over the past year just as I had visited her family in St. Louis. I think they nervously smiled as they asked me when we were planning to get married. Knowing me, as they did, I am sure they were hoping it would be a later date instead of sooner date. I told them next summer after we completed our junior years of college.

With reserve and composure they suggested that Jane and I might consider waiting until after graduation, two years later. They also indicated marriage in their eyes, for anyone including me, is a declaration of financial independence. I believe their suggestion for a later wedding date and the statement regarding financial independence was their subtle way as saying "HAVE YOU GONE CRAZY, YOU'RE ONLY 20 YEARS OLD!"

Have you ever chosen an action in your life where those who are in a position of authority have implicitly or explicitly questioned your sanity or even demanded that you stop thinking those crazy thoughts or engaging in that course of action?

What is one to do in such circumstances? We find two followers of Jesus in such a circumstance as we read our lesson from the 4th chapter of Acts. Unfortunately, the ones questioning Peter and John did not do so with the love and care my parents did as I contemplated marriage at the tender age of 20. Let's look at that lesson.

"By what power or what name did you do this?"

This is not a friendly question.

How do we know it is not a friendly question? The ones asking the question had placed the ones who are being questioned in jail the night before.

This question is asked by the religious authorities in Jerusalem who heard that Peter and John were speaking to the crowds at the Temple and that they were proclaiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. When the authorities heard about this "Jesus talk" to the crowds they were "much annoyed."

One can understand their annoyance. For three years they had been annoyed with Jesus as he taught the crowds in a manner that had the crowds questioning the practices of the authorities. History has repeatedly demonstrated in every corner of the world and in every period of humankind that many who have had the perks of power become annoyed when those with less power start to challenge the legitimacy of that power and the powerful use their power to silence those who question them. For three years the powerful in Jerusalem had been annoyed with the talk of Jesus. He did not necessarily challenge their power but critiqued how they practiced the power at their disposal. He called them hypocrites, repeatedly. That annoyed them.

After three years of Jesus and his talking to the crowds the powerful used their power to silence him in a not so subtle manner, crucifixion.

Now, some 55 days later, the crowds are gathering together again and they are listening to some close associates of the crucified Jesus. That is annoying, to say the least. The authorities thought they had silenced Jesus and his talk. Now Peter and John are proclaiming that there is resurrection of the dead in Jesus and Peter has healed a lame man in the name of Jesus.

“By what power or what name did you do this?” they are asked. Peter simply replies by saying that which was the truth in his heart, “by the name of Jesus Christ...” Peter was simply telling his experience which we can see in the opening verses in the 3rd chapter of Acts.

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the hour of prayer, at three o'clock in the afternoon. ² And a man lame from birth was being carried in. People would lay him daily at the gate of the temple called the Beautiful Gate so that he could ask for alms from those entering the temple. ³ When he saw Peter and John about to go into the temple, he asked them for alms. ⁴ Peter looked intently at him, as did John, and said, “Look at us.” ⁵ And he fixed his attention on them, expecting to receive something from them. ⁶ But Peter said, “I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give you; *in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth*, stand up and walk.” ⁷ And he took him by the right hand and raised him up; and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. ⁸ Jumping up, he stood and began to walk, and he entered the temple with them, walking and leaping and praising God. ⁹ All the people saw him walking and praising God, ¹⁰ and they recognized him as the one who used to sit and ask for alms at the Beautiful Gate of the temple; and they were filled with wonder and amazement at what had happened to him.

“I do it in the name of Jesus Christ” is to be the spirit of our answer for whatever we do or say as we live our lives as disciples of Jesus. We may not use those exact words but that is to be the spirit of our actions as followers of Jesus. I cited this spirit in Lew Corbaley as I shared the eulogy at the Celebration of Life service we had here a couple of weeks ago for he and his wife, Lois.

In the eulogy I noted that Lew had a shoe store in Benson that was originally started by his father and he moved it to Crossroads when that Mall opened in 1960, he also had a store at Westroads. Lew loved his business and his customers. He was an artist as well as a businessman as could be seen in the beautiful display windows he created for his stores. When I arrived at St. Paul and visited with Lew he talked about his business ethics at the shoe store. He told me “We would rather miss a sale than miss a fitting.” The customer comes first. Then with joy Lew shared with me that former employees came back to him over the years and would tell him that they carried that ethic into their business with great success.

I think if I pressed Lew regarding the foundation of his business ethics he would have told me that he did what he did because of the ethics he learned from his father as well as the many years of learning in Sunday School and worship here at St. Paul. He did what he did in the spirit of Jesus Christ.

Think of those times in your life when your action(s) brought forth a response by those in a position of authority to implicitly or explicitly question your sanity or even demand that you stop thinking those crazy thoughts or engaging in that course of action? What is one to do in such circumstances?

I think it is always wise to consider their objection and after thoughtful consideration share our response. Peter's response in the book of Acts provides good guidance as we respond by sharing the truth of our experience. Peter's guidance will impact us in different ways depending upon our experience. I can think of three impacts.

First, upon reflection, as we think about the basis for our thoughts or actions we might appreciate the questions that those in authority lift up and then change our mind and course of action. The thoughtful and loving questions my parents posed to me when I considered marriage at the age of 20 were filled with wisdom. This is the "I am thankful that you shared and helped me change my course of action before I hurt myself and others" response.

Second, upon reflection, as we consider the objections by those in authority we reject the merits of their concerns. Therefore, we bluntly reject their objections and move forward with our course of action. This is the "My rationale is just fine, I invite you to reconsider the merits of my actions and I invite you to jump on board" response.

Third, upon reflection, as we think about the rationale for our thoughts or actions we acknowledge that the authority has lifted up a perspective that has validity but we choose to pursue a course that is different as our perspective maintains its own validity as well. This is the "let's choose to agree to disagree and do it in a respectful manner" response.

"By what power or what name did you do this?"

It is never easy to critique another or to receive criticism from another. But when we do it "in the name and spirit of Jesus" goodness can emerge. Amen.