

The Name of Jesus
Acts 4:1-13
Preached by Rev. Dr. Harry Cahill
Babcock Presbyterian Church
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If you've ever felt inadequate and ordinary consider this story from Acts because it's about two ordinary uneducated men who just happen to be companions of Jesus. By the way, I really appreciate that phrase "ordinary, uneducated men recognized...as companions of Jesus." Through this talk you'll understand why.

There are times when all of us fear we are ordinary and uneducated, that is, we are not thoroughly trained experts who can handle a particular problem. So what do we instinctively do? Back away, quit even before we start or maybe pass the buck to someone we perceive to be more competent. True, sometimes retreat is the better part of valor and we need to recognize our limitations; but there are other times when you and only you must take the bull by the horns and face the situation, even though you feel very ordinary and uneducated because if you don't, who will? Besides, you may miss an opportunity to unleash the power of God through your obedience and faithfulness.

Peter and John, two ordinary and uneducated men, were hauled before the Council, the same assembly that condemned Jesus to death on Good Friday. Picture the scene. Two fishermen from Galilee, two ordinary, uneducated men facing down the brightest and the best: An'nas the high priest, Caiphas and all the others of the high priest family. Two ordinary, uneducated men going head to head with Bible scholars and theologians, the power elite of the temple, men who spent their lives searching and debating the scriptures. These were also men who knew how to keep and wield power, very able politicians, old hands at infighting and winning turf wars. How could two ordinary men stand up to such savvy and powerful adversaries?

I really hope you pay attention this morning, because you just might learn a powerful, life-changing lesson. Here it is, you have the potential to have a profound effect on the people around you whenever you let God use you, even though you are both ordinary and uneducated.

Last Sunday the lesson told the story of Peter and John healing a lame beggar in the temple. In today's lesson Peter and John were just arrested for proclaiming to the crowds that they healed the man in the name of Jesus. Peter said, "And by faith in his name, his name itself made this man strong, whom you see and know; and the faith that is through Jesus has given him this perfect health..." (Acts 3:16)

The Sadducees and the temple priests hearing the phrase “the name of Jesus” must have quickly developed a bad case of heart burn. They thought crucifying Jesus would be the end of it, but now his disciples were back with a vengeance! So they threw them in jail for the night and then continued their game of intimidation by hauling them into the same courtroom they convicted Jesus. But instead of shutting up these ordinary, uneducated fishermen the High Priests themselves were intimidated.

Peter, emboldened and empowered by the Spirit spoke. “Rulers of the people and elders...let it be known to all of you...that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is the stone rejected by you the builders; it has become the cornerstone! There is no salvation in on one else, for there is no other name under heaven...by which we must be saved.” (Acts 4:9-12)

Last week I told you about the authority of Jesus being passed on to his disciples, enabling them to go out into the world to continue his ministry. These disciples were successful not because they relied on their own skills and charm, but only because they allowed the power of God, placed deep within them, to flow out into the people they served. You see when they became servants to others, when they lowered themselves to lift up people in need, that’s when God’s power became real.

My dictionary says a servant is a person devoted to another. What a great definition! Jesus was devoted to his disciples, he was their servant. Jesus lived and died for his friends. He made himself available to others, even when he was tired, even when it was dangerous. Jesus, the servant Christ found a kingdom of servants and we, like Jesus, are called to serve one another and the world.

And like John and Peter, we serve in the name of Jesus. That’s the phrase Peter always used when explaining the source of his power. He taught, healed and served in the name of Jesus. In old novels and movies about kings and their knights you sometimes hear phrases like “Stop, in the name of the king!” or “Open up in the name of the king!” The soldiers or servants of the king, by themselves lacked power or authority, but when they evoked the king’s name, that was a different matter. Everyone stopped, listened and obeys, in the name of the king.

You may be ordinary and uneducated, have no credentials, no authority to speak of, but when you answer the call to discipleship and become a servant of Christ, you act in the name of King Jesus of Nazareth. The one we rejected on Good Friday has become the cornerstone, the foundation of our lives and the world.

In the spirit Peter proclaimed, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:12)

The Bible is clear on this, Jesus is the world's highest governing authority. His last words to his disciples is a case in point. "All authority on heaven and earth has been given to me..." (Matthew 28:18) In Philippians Paul makes the claim, "the name of Jesus is above all other names...at the name of Jesus every knee shall bow and tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." (Philippians 2:10) In Colossians Paul states, "He is the image of the invisible God...for through him all things...were created things visible, things invisible...all things were created in him and for him..." (Colossians 1:15-16) Jesus himself claimed, "I am the way, the truth and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me." (John 15)

Needless to say, this has always been a controversial claim, especially with non Christians. "How dare you Christians claim to have a corner on the truth, do you think you're better than everyone else?" Of course not. But we do believe Jesus is better than everyone else.

We Presbyterians have written a statement that affirms this controversial claim: "Jesus Christ is the only Savior and Lord and all people everywhere are called to place their faith, hope and love in him. No one is saved by virtue of inherent goodness or admirable living, 'for by grace you have been saved by faith and this is not your own doing, it is a gift of God.' (Ephesians 2:8) No one is saved apart from God's gracious redemption in Jesus Christ."

That's an exclusive statement affirming the Bible's teaching of the supremacy of Christ. But remember, we trust, not in ourselves, not in our understanding of salvation, instead we trust in the name of Jesus. That's why we Presbyterians didn't end this statement of faith there, but continued...

"Yet we do not presume to limit the sovereign freedom of God our Savior, who desires everyone to be saved and come to the knowledge of truth. (1 Timothy 2:3-4) Thus we neither restrict the grace of God to those who profess explicit faith in Christ nor assume all people are saved regardless of faith. Grace, love and communion belong to God, and are not ours to determine."

Let me put that last paragraph in my own words. Someday everyone who ever lived on this earth will face the final judgment and the sole judge will be Jesus Christ. He alone will be the judge, not you, not me, not Jerry Falwell, not the Pope, not Jesse Jackson. Only Jesus, and from what I know about Jesus, I trust he'll do the right thing, he will judge with full wisdom, unconditional love and great mercy.

So our job, as Christians, is not to determine who is in and who is out. How could we, after all we are just ordinary and uneducated people. Your job

then, is simply to be a companion of Jesus, let him love and serve you, so you can love and serve him by loving and serving others.

One more thing. Don't obsess about being ordinary and uneducated, that's really not a problem. Instead be glad that in the name of Jesus you can do great things for Christ and his Kingdom.