

**June 23, 2019
Acts 4:15-22
Pastor Rosanna McFadden
Creekside COB**

“How Can We Keep Silent?”

Good morning! This is the third week of the sermon series Drawn by the Spirit; with a break to enjoy the message from Pastor David Bibbee last week, I have been preaching from the book of Acts and challenging us as a congregation to pray and see how our prayer might set the stage for our mission and vision at Creekside. Here’s a spoiler alert: this Sunday and next week are some stories from Acts which may be challenging to some listeners. Please don’t hit the mental Mute button: I’m going to talk about the relationship between ministry and money, and what things are most valuable in our lives and in our church.

Thanks to Larry for reading this text from Acts 4. I struggled with what portion of this chapter to list as the reading this morning, because it’s a part of a larger story. Of course, the book of Acts is a continuation of an even larger story. Acts begins with the words, “In the first book . . .” the first book was the story of Jesus’ birth, ministry, death, resurrection and ascension to heaven as told in the gospel of Luke. Acts is written by the same author and continues that story with the prayer of the disciples, the coming of the Holy Spirit, and the vision and mission of the church to spread the good news of Jesus Christ and to welcome and baptize new believers. These are stories within stories of the grand narrative of God’s plan for creation and salvation through Jesus. That’s the Big Picture. There’s a tiny sliver of that story that I want to focus on today. It’s Acts 4 verse 20 and I want to summarize how the author of Acts has come to that point.

In Acts Chapter 1, the apostles, Jesus’ brothers and women believers are gathering daily in Jerusalem to pray. In Chapter 2, the Holy Spirit like the rush of a mighty wind and like flames over their heads, and

the disciples begin to speak and people from all over the known world hear the message in their own language. Peter stands up and addresses the crowd with words from the prophet Joel about the Spirit being poured out on all people, and that these disciples are witnesses to Jesus Christ being raised up by God, and that Peter can say with certainty that Jesus who was crucified was Lord and Messiah -- the anointed of God. About three thousand people who hear this message repent and are baptized, and this is how the church begins. Are you with me so far?

Our sub-story begins in chapter 3. Peter and John have emerged as the leaders of the disciples, and they are going to the Temple in Jerusalem for afternoon prayers. They are stopped at a gate to the Temple by a lame beggar who asks them for money. Peter and John look intently at the man, who looks expectantly back at them, and Peter says (you might know the Sunday School song) "Silver and gold have I none, but such as I have give I thee: in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up and walk." And you know what happened next: the man went walking and leaping and praising God. A crowd gathers, and Peter -- as preachers do -- takes the opportunity to preach to the Jewish crowd about how they were wrong to reject and kill Jesus Christ, because it is the faith that is through Jesus that has given this man perfect health.

This brings us to Chapter 4, which says that while Peter and John were speaking outside the Temple, the priests, Sadducees -- the elite priests -- and the captain of the Temple came out and were (and I quote) "much annoyed." I couldn't find a translation which said thoroughly ticked off. They have Peter and John arrested, and since it's now evening, Peter and John spend the night in jail and are brought up before the authorities the next morning. The priests ask "By what power of by what name did you do this?" And Peter is filled with the Holy Spirit and says, "If you insist on questioning us for doing a good deed and healing a man whom you all know has been lame from birth, I'll tell you: he was healed in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom *you* crucified and who God raised from the dead." Well. The Jewish leaders call in the formerly lame man, who is clearly in good health now, and they are stumped. So they send the beggar and Peter and John out of the council room so they can talk to each other. It's obvious that a miracle has occurred: this man was of

great age, nearly forty years old (!) and there are all kinds of witnesses, including the man himself. So they call Peter and John back in and say, “OK, we’re going to let you off this time, but no more miracles. Stop speaking and teaching in Jesus’ name. Do we make ourselves clear?” And Peter and John reply, “You decide what God would want you to do. As for us, we cannot keep silent about what we have seen and heard.” It’s an extraordinary statement of faith and defiance.

It made me wonder -- and I’m going to ask you to do some wondering with me -- about things I have kept silent about, and what my silence says about what I value. I’m going to give you some scenarios to consider -- I realize answers might vary, depending on specific people and situations, but try to go with me here.

Would you keep silent if someone voiced an opinion that you disagree with about a political candidate?

Would you keep silent when someone made a racist joke or derogatory comment about a group that you are not a part of?

Would you keep silent if that comment was about a group that you are a part of?

Would you keep silent if you suspected a co-worker had a drinking problem? Would you keep silent if you suspected a co-worker was embezzling money?

Would you keep silent if someone was abusing an animal? Would you keep silent if you suspected someone was abusing a child? Would you keep silent if it was your child?

Would you keep silent if you had gotten a significant raise or bonus from your employer?

Would you keep silent if your child had been recognized for academic achievement?

I’m not suggesting there are simple answers to these questions, or that everyone’s answers should be the same. There may be times

when keeping silent is the safest, least disruptive and simplest thing to do. But Acts 4 seems to say part of the work of the Holy Spirit is to give us the courage and the boldness to speak out loud about the things we have seen and heard; I think this can include speaking about injustice we have witnessed which is contrary to the will of God. Speaking is not just words: when we witness to Jesus Christ, we speak about things which have happened, and we speak with the conviction that God will continue to make things happen or bringing healing to places which are broken; this gives glory to God for working through us in the name of Jesus Christ. If you have been reading in our prayer challenge, "Draw the Circle" you will know that this is part of the definition of prayer: prayer is a willingness to be drawn by the Spirit to have the boldness (Batterson calls it shameless audacity) to ask God for what we need. This includes praying with the conviction that God has the power to make things happen. It also means having the humility to know that our prayers may not be answered in the way we expected or hoped, and the patience to realize that we may have to pray for as long as it takes until we see the answers. Batterson suggests keeping a prayer journal. Anyone can do this -- you can purchase a Draw the Circle prayer journal, but any written record will do. Write down the name of a person for whom you are praying, or a situation you are praying about. A written record helps you remember to keep those things in prayer, but more importantly, it allows you to look back and see the ways which God has acted so you can give glory to God.

I said at the beginning of this sermon that I was going to talk about ministry and money. I think if we could go back to the lame beggar at the gate of the Temple and ask him if he would rather have the money he was asking for or to be healed, I'm pretty sure he'd want to be healed. He didn't ask for that in the first place because he didn't know the power of faith through Jesus of Nazareth could accomplish that miracle. I believe God's heart is for ministry which heals, forgives, teaches and proclaims. If you disagree, I'd like to talk to you after the service. I proposed this 40 Day prayer challenge because I believe that prayer is the foundation of Christian ministry. If our vision is not grounded in reading God's Word and listening for God's voice, we will not be going in the right direction. Prayer costs nothing but your time. I know your time is valuable; I like to think mine is too. Having you to sign up for a time each day when you will commit to

pray does not seem like too much to ask. We list prayer requests in the bulletin each week, have folks share in worship, and know that there are many other concerns and joys which remain unspoken. If we believe that the prayer of the righteous is powerful and effective, why would we withhold that from our sisters and brothers and church and world which is in need of it? How can we expect to do God's will if we aren't willing to pause for long enough to listen for God's voice? I believe that even a small commitment of time on a regular basis will shape us individually and as a congregation. If we are not willing to do small things for God, how will we even know that faith through Jesus of Nazareth which can do big things for us?

I know your money is valuable, too. We all have financial responsibilities for ourselves and others, and every person in this room has limited financial resources. The limits are different, but we all have limits. We know that the ministries of this church take money -- not only the preaching and teaching and outreach, but the mortgage and the air conditioning -- if we know those ministries require money, why would we withhold that? The most valuable things are not necessarily the most costly. I'm not suggesting you deprive yourself or your family of things you need. I suspect every one of us has had to forgo something we want because we can't afford it. That's the case with Creekside, too: there are ministries we might do if we had different resources. Our teams do a fantastic job of using their budgets to serve their goals; we have made significant investment in welcome, safety, and accessibility with this building: why would those of us who benefit the most not support that? Like prayer, I believe that even a small commitment to give money to the church on a regular basis will shape us individually and as a congregation. How can we keep silent when our action can give glory to God?

I'd like to challenge you this week to consider how you can commit to being part of a vision for Creekside. I believe that there is a connection between a commitment to pray, a commitment to give financial support, and a commitment to ministry. You may disagree. I hope you'll talk about this in your Sunday School classes today. I hope you'll talk about it even if you aren't part of a class or can't stay today. What do we owe to God for our salvation through Jesus Christ and for the power of the Holy Spirit? What do we, who know Jesus, owe to the world which does not? How can we keep silent? Amen.