

St. Paul's Lutheran Church, Muskego, Wisconsin  
January 24, 2010

## Sovereign Lord, Enable Your Servants to Speak Your Word with Great Boldness

*Acts 4:23-31, page 1081*

The sermon begins with the video *Evangelism: Here am I Lord, Send Me* from [www.worshiphousemedia.com](http://www.worshiphousemedia.com).

“Here I am Lord. Send me.” Hasn’t the Holy Spirit put that same desire in your heart? You’ve heard Jesus’ great commission: “Preach the Gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). You know the world around you is your mission field. We’ve bought into our congregation’s vision: “By every possible means we bring every person within our area of influence closer to Christ.” But honestly we may wonder, “Where do I start?”

I’d like to suggest the place to begin is prayer. That’s what we see in the lives of the apostles. When they were told that they would be witnesses, they spent ten days in prayer waiting for the Holy Spirit to be poured out on them at Pentecost.

Perhaps just a few days later, Peter and John were arrested for preaching in Jesus’ name. Our lesson begins with their release. After hearing threats against their lives, what did that do next? They prayed. Let’s listen in on their prayer in Acts 4:23-31:

*<sup>23</sup>On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. <sup>24</sup>When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God. “Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. <sup>25</sup>You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:*

*Why do the nations rage  
and the peoples plot in vain?*

*<sup>26</sup>The kings of the earth take their stand  
and the rulers gather together  
against the Lord  
and against his Anointed One.*

*<sup>27</sup>Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. <sup>28</sup>They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. <sup>29</sup>Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. <sup>30</sup>Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”*

*<sup>31</sup>After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.*

Let’s begin this three-week study of God’s call to speak his word with the prayer of the apostles:

**Sovereign Lord, enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness.**

And as we study this prayer let's get a little more specific.

1. Let your servants know your Word like the apostles.
2. Let your servants pray like the apostles.
3. Let your servants speak like the apostles.

Peter and John had been standing before the Sanhedrin that had condemned their Lord just a few months before. They were told not to teach in Jesus' name any more. "But Peter and John replied, "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:19-20).

What had they seen and heard? They had seen Jesus perform miracles. They had heard him teach. They had seen him die. They had heard him foretell his resurrection. They had seen him alive. They had heard his command to be witnesses. They knew Jesus, the Word of God, personally, didn't they? And so they talked about what they had seen and heard.

So what have you seen and heard? Perhaps witnessing seems artificial because we really haven't seen or heard anything of importance lately.

I know that when someone is talking about the great football game yesterday, and I haven't seen it, I don't take an active part in the conversation. I don't have anything to add. But if I've seen it, even though I don't know that much about football, I can talk about what I saw and heard.

If it is your prayer that you speak God's Word boldly like the apostles, then ask God to help you make seeing and hearing him the most important part of your day. **"Let your servant know your Word like the apostles."**

To help you in that regard, remember whose voice you are listening to when you read the Bible. "You spoke **by the Holy Spirit** through the mouth of your servant, our father David" (Acts 4:25).

I can assure you that if you commit yourselves to reading the words spoken by the Holy Spirit every day, that the Holy Spirit will fill your ears and eyes with Jesus.

After reading God's Word, we might think, "Ok, now I'm ready to witness." But there was another step the apostles took. After they were released, they prayed some more. Listen to that prayer and learn from it. **Let your servants pray like the apostles.**

"Sovereign Lord, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them." Why did they begin the prayer that way? Because they were confronting an enemy more powerful than they. They were no match for Herod and Pilate and the Sanhedrin. But their God was more than a match for them.

Let us pray like the apostles, trusting in God's **power**. We too face enemies far more powerful than we. Satan is attacking the church and her members. The church as a whole seems to be on the defensive, slowly shrinking in the face of increasing pressure from the world around us. But we have a God who created the heavens and the earth. Lord, use your power to protect your church and help it carry out your mission.

The apostles went on in prayer, “Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”

The apostles trusted in God’s **will**. We know that Peter at first didn’t understand that Jesus had to suffer. Often we won’t understand why God allows troubles to come on his church and on his people. But we trust God’s will. Nothing is beyond his control. We don’t have to understand. With the Psalmist in Psalm 131 let’s pray that we don’t try to understand things that are too wonderful for us, too lofty for us to attain. Instead let’s still and quiet our souls like a weaned child with its mother. As we seek to be witnesses to the Lord, let’s trust that God’s **will** is being done and that his **will** is best.

And let’s pray like the apostles, trusting in his **power in us**. “Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus” (Acts 4:29-30).

Jesus could do miracles through the apostles. They healed people, cast out demons, even raised the dead. Jesus worked with the apostles, confirming the word they spoke by miraculous signs and wonders (Mark 16:20). Even though that work of confirmation is done, even though we have the confirmed word here in the Bible, that doesn’t mean that Jesus is less powerful today. Jesus is still working powerfully in us.

I’m amazed at his power. I see that power in women and men who devote countless hours of their time to leading Bible studies for youth and adults. I see that power at work in individuals who donate hundreds of hours of their time every year for music for worship or helping our children in the school or coaching. I see that power at work in the testimony that our members are giving to the community around them.

That leads to the third part of our prayer: **Let your servants speak like the apostles.**

The last verse of the lesson says, “After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.”

How do you get better at anything? You practice! So if this is our prayer that we speak boldly like the apostles, then let’s practice.

Let’s practice it right here in church. Did you know that every week we have probably two or three dozen people who are guests in our services?

Often I’m told, “Well, I don’t know who are members and who aren’t.” Really, it doesn’t make any difference. I’d ask you first of all to simply keep your eyes open in the church lobby or in the pews. What are you looking for? Someone who looks uncomfortable. Perhaps they look like they don’t know where to go. Maybe it is someone or a couple standing all alone in the lobby. This is an incredibly important time in that person’s spiritual journey. They’ve made the decision for one reason or another to come to worship. They are very quickly gaining first impressions – good or bad – that will be hard to erase.

So go up to the person all alone. But what do you do then? Just stand there? Perhaps you can just remember the acronym SALT.

Say something! My line is, “Hi, I’m Pete Panitzke. I’m one of the pastors here. I can’t put a name with face.” Or you could say, “Hi, my name is Pete. I don’t know if we have met.” Or “Hi! Welcome to St. Paul’s. Glad to see you. My name is Pete. What’s yours.”

The first words aren’t all that important. The important thing is that you recognize here is someone who needs a “friend” and **say something**.

The next thing in SALT is **ask questions**. Take an interest in the person. I like to ask if they are from the area. It may be they are here from out of state for a baptism. If they are, don’t ignore them. They are still gaining an impression about Christians. Ask what brought them to St. Paul’s, if they have been here often (or how long they have been a member here and you didn’t know them). Ask what they do for a living.

The third letter is **L: Listen carefully**. Show that you really want to know them better.

The last letter is **T: Take it deeper**. In a conversation in the lobby, taking it deeper may be simply asking if you can show them around, the nursery, the Grace Room and church library, let them know where the restrooms are. Offer them a cup of coffee. If they aren’t with anyone else, invite them to come into church and sit down with them. Be there to help explain or lead the way. They may be experiencing Lutheran worship for the first time and wondering why we stand up and sit down and where we are in the service. You are the host. Talk like an apostle, showing love to those who are strangers.

And we pray: **Let your servants speak like the apostles out there in the world**.

There is nothing better than the testimony of a **satisfied customer**.

I was privileged to hear that kind of testimony second hand this past week. A neighbor of one of our members was at a community function. He mentioned he was thinking of converting to the Lutheran faith – because he had heard and seen so many good things about the church from neighbors in his subdivision.

I heard another example this past week directly. In a phone conversation a parent of one of our school children mentioned how she appreciated the Christian education that her child received here at St. Paul’s. She mentioned how she was so impressed by the teachers and the school as a whole.

Lord, help us talk like that – voicing our appreciation in words and actions for what you have done for us as our Savior and then what you give to us in our church.

Finally, I want to give you a little primer on sharing your faith. In the pew racks in front of you are brochures called “The Great Exchange.” Through simple line drawings and passages, the way of salvation is explained. On the first panel is our problem of sin. On the second panel is how we try to make ourselves measure up to God and how we fail. The third panel contains the good news that Jesus is our substitute for all our sins. The fourth panel explains how God brings that gift of forgiveness to us through his word. The last panel shows the blessings we have flowing from Christ.

Take as many as you want along. You don't need to use this tool. Just tell others what you have seen and heard. But it can help. Memorize the passages. Then as you listen to people, you can tell – they need to hear this panel about sin, or they already know their sin so I can tell them the next panel right now that Jesus is gave us his perfection and he took our sin.

Practice this. Memorize. You don't need to know things word for word. But the more you know a basic outline like this, it can reassure you that the Holy Spirit will use you to speak like the apostles.

Don't feel you need to know everything. The best answer you can give someone is, "That's a great question. Let me do some Bible study and get back to you." It may take 40 times hearing the same message in different conversations before the Holy Spirit breaks into someone's heart. Leaving a question unanswered is a door right back into that conversation on a later day.

Finally, don't be afraid of saying the wrong thing. Ask, even as a conversation is beginning, to let the Holy Spirit guide you in what to say. And trust that he who created the heavens and the earth has the power to work in you to accomplish his will too. Pray and then speak God's word boldly, just like the apostles. Amen.

Prepared by Pastor Peter Panitzke  
414-422-0320, ext. 122  
[ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org](mailto:ppanitzke@stpaulmuskego.org)