

**Pastor Jonna Bohigian**  
**Humbly Hearing the Truth**  
Acts 4:1 – 12

Jesus has ascended, the Holy Spirit has descended, the disciples are empowered, and people have *flocked* to them. *Thousands* have come to believe, to follow in the way of Jesus, and they have become a *big* family. The believers' love for one another, and how that has manifested in their life together, is *compelling*. The Spirit is alive and active, moving in the hearts of those who see and hear. Something *profound*, something *revolutionary* is happening here.

Peter and John go up to the temple for prayer. On the way, they meet a crippled man, sitting at the gate called Beautiful. This man's life is dependent upon what is given to him, so Peter and John are not surprised when he asks them for money. They don't have money, but they have something much *greater*.

"Look at us!" Peter says (Acts 3:4b). Peter wants to meet his eyes, to *see* this man. He wants to know if the man has the courage to see *him*. This man has dignity and *incalculable* worth. He is one Jesus came to save, one he came to save *now*. He is to be a part of the expansive kingdom of God, a part of the restorative work of God in the world.

"In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk," Peter commands (Acts 3:6b). Peter brings him to his feet, and instantly the man's feet and ankles become strong. He jumps and walks with them into the temple courts, praising God.

Many recognize that this man who now walks and jumps is the same man who sat at the gate, begging for money. They *flock* to them, amazed with what has taken place.

But it was by no power or godliness of Peter and John that healed this man; it was faith in the name of Jesus. Faith in the name of the glorified servant of God, who was handed over, disowned, and killed by *them*. *They* killed him. But God raised him from the dead, and it is by faith in the name of Jesus, that this once crippled man is now strong and has received *complete* healing. They now are called to *repent*, to turn, and believe.

As they are teaching, the priests, the captain of the temple guard, and the Sadducees join in. When they hear what Peter and John are saying, they are *horrified*, because they are teaching that in Jesus, the dead are resurrected. Well, this is simply unacceptable. It is heretical, and people are believing it, so they *have* to put a stop to it! They seize Peter and John, and put them in jail until the next day.

The next day, members of the Sanhedrin are called together. The Sanhedrin is a “judicial council composed of seventy-one of the wisest and best educated men in Israel.”<sup>1</sup> They have significant power. They have *supreme authority* in all areas but one, capital punishment.

They have Peter and John brought before them and question them. “By what power or what name did you do this?” (Acts 4:7b).

If there is any occasion for Peter and John to try to save their skins, *this* is it! The moment of truth. Peter steps up to the plate. Filled with the Holy Spirit, he says that if they need to account for an act of kindness shown to a cripple and tell them how he was healed, he will tell them! “It is by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom [*they*] crucified, that this man stands before [*them*] healed.” Jesus is the stone

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<sup>1</sup> Steven Ger, *The Book of Acts*, 72.

*they* rejected, and has become the cornerstone. “Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:10b – 12).

What will happen in the trial? Tune in next week to find out!

As you listened to this story, with whom did you find yourself resonating? Peter and John? The healed man? The crowd? The Sanhedrin? Maybe you have received a healing or God has healed someone through you, and so you connect with Peter and John or the healed man. Maybe you are curious about Jesus and feel drawn to the things of God, so you relate to the crowd. Did you resonate with the Sanhedrin, the group with power, which demanded answers to what should be celebrated, the ones who couldn't hear the truth?

As I read the story, I felt an immediate kinship with Peter and John. I am a Christian, just as they were. I felt this desire to do what Peter and John did – to boldly do just what I am called to do. To look a person in the eye and know when God wants to heal them, and to be a part of that saving work. To speak boldly, regardless of the consequences. To speak truth to power.

That desire has not left me. Yet as I considered this story and the characters in it, I realized that I am *not* Peter and John. Nor are you. Our situation is entirely different from theirs. Peter and John were a part of a growing group, but a fledgling minority group, a group who would be persecuted, a group without power or influence, a group which experienced the deaths of many faithful people, a group which would have no rights or political influence for hundreds of years.

In a study conducted by the Pew Research Center in 2018 and 2019, 65% of American adults described themselves as Christians. Christians in the United States are greater in number than any other religious group, plus those who do not adhere to any religion. *We are* the majority. We are a *declining* majority, down 12% over the last decade, but *we are* the majority.<sup>2</sup> And we have power and influence.

Our nation was founded by Christians, on Christian principles, and every president which has ever taken oath has defined himself as a Christian. Regardless of your political affiliation or personal sentiments, the significant majority of white mainline Protestants and white evangelicals voted for President Trump in 2016, 57% and 77%, respectively.<sup>3</sup>

We are not very much like Peter and John. We are their grafted in *descendants*, but in this story, we are the *Sanhedrin*. *We are* the majority; *we have* the power.

Most likely, this is not what you were hoping to hear. No one wants to be the antagonist, the antihero, in the story. I know *I* don't. But you and I aren't stuck as the antagonist.

What if something had been different with the Sanhedrin, so that they could have heard the truth? What if they had been open to God moving in new ways? What if they had opened themselves to listen to those in weaker positions? What if they hadn't held onto their power so tightly, but had been willing to risk their power to hear the truth? What if they had been humble?

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.people-press.org/2018/08/09/an-examination-of-the-2016-electorate-based-on-validated-voters/>

If we whittle it down, this is it, isn't it? The Sanhedrin had no humility. They had hardened themselves. They had closed themselves off from everyone but themselves. They were *insistent* that they were the authority, that they had the truth! They had gone so far as to kill Jesus of Nazareth, and they did not even now *question* that decision. Their pride was their fall. They had no humility.

Humility is that quality that we so admire and desire to have. But it is something that we frankly *don't* want to aspire to. Humility is to be low, lowly. It is a vulnerable position. *No one* wants to be low and vulnerable. We want to be right, esteemed, highly regarded – *not* low. Humility often comes, in fact, when a person is *made* to be low, when they are humbled, and they have no *choice* but to take inventory and to recognize the sinfulness in their own hearts.

At the end of every Confirmation class, Anna-Marie and I have the privilege to interview our students before they confirm their faith. One of the questions we ask is regarding their favorite lesson. In a recent class, one student told us that her favorite was on the 10 Commandments. Anna-Marie and I were immediately taken aback by this surprising answer. We had never before heard this reply. We proceeded to ask why. Through teary eyes, she said that it was because it caused her to look at her sin. We sat in stunned silence. What a testimony from an eighth grade girl!

It is so much easier to look at ourselves with pride. *Look at all of the good decisions I've made, we say. Look at how successful I am, how generous, how loving, how kind. I am so much better than that person. That person just doesn't get it. I'm*

*glad I'm on the right side of this. I would never have made that terrible decision. When history looks back on me, it will look on me as a good person.*

One of the most mortifying lessons I learned as a young adult was the concept of projection, the denial of a quality in oneself and the attribution and perhaps, magnification of that same quality in someone else. It mortified me, because I wanted to be justified. I wanted to be able to write off people who offended me or bothered me. I didn't want to have to look in the mirror and wonder what it was in *me* that caused me to dislike or to hate a particular quality in someone else.

Jesus spoke about projection in his teachings. "Do not judge, or you too will be judged. For in the same way you judge others, you will be judged, and with the measure you use it, it will be measured to you. Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when all the time there is a plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye" (Matthew 7:1 - 5).

As individuals and as a culture, we are *so* arrogant, *so* prideful. We like those who are like us and don't listen to or care for those with a different opinion or perspective than us. *You* are called to more. *We* are called to more.

When I first came to St. Timothy's, I was introduced to a woman who had been placed on hospice for, I believe, the fourth time. Pastor Jim introduced her to me as "Dee of the Nine Lives." Dee Abeloe was a woman in her 90's who had taught

Sunday school and had been a part of the life of St. Timothy's for a *long* time. She was on hospice, but you wouldn't know it. She had a vibrancy and interest in life much like a little child does.

Her body began to decline. Her family was notified, and they discussed who would go to be with her to provide care and comfort. To Dee's *great* surprise, her sister volunteered for the job. Dee and her sister had been estranged for *decades*. Yet, there she was as Dee's companion until the end.

Dee told me that she wondered if God had given her all of these many opportunities, this long life, in order to be reconciled to her sister. They were so different, and yet, they had so much in common.

Before she died, I asked Dee if I could share her story with you. She told me, "Yes! Please share my story often, so that it can be an encouragement to others. I want others to learn from the mistakes of my life."

As Christians, our purpose is to be "little Christs," and together, the body of Christ. We have so often failed to embody that truth, and instead have stood in judgment over others, unable to hear the truth when it is staring us in the face.

God's purpose for you and for me is not to remain in that place, not to despair, and not to give up. His purpose is that we might be changed, that we might repent, turn, and follow obediently in the way of Jesus, that the kingdom of God might come to earth as it is in heaven.

He won't give up on you, no matter how old you are and no matter the sinful decisions you have made. He loves you, and has demonstrated His love for you in that while you were still a sinner, Christ died for you (Rom 5:8).

He died for you. Not because you are worthy or have proven yourself or because you are a good person. Christ died for you because you are a sinner, just like me. He died to reconcile you to God, that *you* might be an agent of reconciliation for the world.

May the Spirit lead us forward in humility, that we will hear the truth when it is spoken, repent, and be agents of reconciliation for the world. Amen.

The only perfect One became the sin of all to save us. So let him be high and lifted up!