

Pray for Boldness —Rev. Denise Stone

FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BIG FLATS NY, 6-16-19

We have a convergence of occasions today. Of course, it is Father's Day – part of why we are in the Park today to celebrate and have a picnic following our Service.

Today is also Trinity Sunday in the Church Calendar. It is a day specifically set aside to think about and learn and worship our Triune God.

And today is the second Sunday in our series about the Work of the Spirit. So while the Trinity will most definitely be in the background of our text, our focus will be on the Holy Spirit.

We enter the text today in the middle of a larger story. Prior to verse 23, Peter and John had been arrested by the religious leadership because of their preaching about Jesus and his resurrection. Before they were released, the authorities strictly instructed Peter and John to cease their preaching.

That is where we pick up the text today. After they were released, Peter and John returned to their friends and told them what had happened.

Note that Peter and John did not go off and hide after they were released. These are not the same men who had previously hidden behind locked doors after the

death of Jesus. These are men who received the power of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. These are emboldened men who have publicly been preaching the good news of Jesus.

And after their release – Peter and John went to their group of friends. This was not just the apostles that they went to, but a larger group of people. And then we have recorded one of the first prayer meetings of the early church.

Because the followers of Christ who were gathered, after all they had heard about what had happened, they did not complain about how hard their life was, they did not try to formulate plans of attack but rather they stopped and they prayed together.

In their prayer, they reaffirmed for themselves who God is and has been. Now, God did not need reminding about God-self, but the people needed to remind themselves about the mighty deeds of God. And once they were reminded, they could then turn and make a request of God.

The people of God spent four of the verses in this passage reminding themselves of who God is. They then turn to a request.

It is important that the people prayed in the manner that they did. By reminding themselves of the nature of and

the act of God, their requests of God become more in line with the will of God.

Think about it. The people could have asked for Holy fire to be brought down on their enemies or for protection in an age that would see the persecution of the church only increasing.

But that is NOT what they asked for. Look at verses 29 and 30ⁱ, “²⁹ And now, Lord, look at their threats, and grant to your servants to speak your word with all boldness, ³⁰ while you stretch out your hand to heal, and signs and wonders are performed through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

They asked for 2 things – to allow them to speak the good news of Jesus with Boldness and for them to be able to serve as vessels of God’s healing in the name of Jesus Christ.

Peter and John were commanded by the Religious leaders to not preach and heal in the name of Jesus and the people ask God, through the Holy Spirit, to give them boldness in their witnessing about Jesus and to allow them to heal in the name of Jesus.

Verse 31 tells us ³¹ When they had prayed, the place in which they were gathered together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

See that there - they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God with boldness.

It was the work of the Holy Spirit that enabled them to speak with boldness and to heal in the name of Jesus.

Verses 32-37 tell us that the believers were then united in purpose and fellowship. It is because of the work of the Holy Spirit that they were able to work and live together and to care for each other.

Look particularly at verse 33 for evidence of the Spirit's work, ³³ "With great power the apostles gave their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all."

They prayed for Boldness and that is what they received. They received through the Holy Spirit the boldness to continue preaching the resurrection of and salvation through Jesus Christ.

Where does that leave us today? What is the message for us from this passage?

In conversations with many of you, you have expressed a desire for First Presbyterian Church of Big Flats to grow in numbers and in ministries. Those are worthy and lofty goals, especially in an age that sees church attendance dwindling across denominations.

So, how will that happen? Having a new pastor will not magically make more people come through the doors. Having new programs will not make more people come through the doors.

What will? **The Holy Spirit working through You will.**

I feel like I've said this many times since coming to this church, but when was the last time in you invited someone to come to church with you? When was the last time you told someone about your faith in God?

Today's text is clear that in order to make an impact on our community in the name of Jesus Christ, we need to pray for Boldness. Boldness to speak the name of Jesus. Boldness to stand up for what we know to be true.

We need to pray for the power of the Holy Spirit to come and continue the Spirit's work in and through us as individuals and as the body of believers planted in this time and in this place.

We need to be willing to step out of our comfort zone. We need to be willing to think of new ways of doing things. We need to be willing to pray for Boldness.

And if we do that – if we pray that the Holy Spirit will come on us in power and gives us the boldness to speak

the name of Jesus – then we might just be able to join God where God is already at work.

You were given a piece of paper this morning – and there are pencils and pens available if you don't have one. I want you to write down one goal or ministry idea that you have for our church – *other than growing in numbers* – so come up with something else to put on the paper.

There are baskets here for you to put your piece of paper when the service is over (*and if you are reading this online, feel free to send me an email with your goals and ideas*).

But right now, after you have written your goal or ministry idea, I want us to pray together. I want us to pray for boldness, boldness from the Holy Spirit, just as the early church did.

Pray within your hearts as I lead our prayer,

Holy God,
When we think about the largeness of life,
we often feel small and unknown.
The task ahead hangs over us
And instead of enjoying the adventure,
we embrace the anxiety.
Jesus, help us be strong.
Oh that our hearts would dare for you
With total abandonment of our inhibitions.
May your love abolish any fears
And exchange our wavering for unfaltering.
May your strength annihilate our feeble thoughts
And infuse our spirit with your power.
Give us the boldness to step forward
In full courage for your glory.
Because Your Word promises
that you began a good work in each of us
And you will complete it.
May we fully believe and treasure the promise.
Amen.ⁱⁱ

ⁱ New Revised Standard Version (**NRSV**)

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(All Scripture quoted is from the NRSV).

ⁱⁱ Adapted from the prayer found at <https://rachelwojo.com/a-prayer-for-boldness/>.