

## Acts 4:13–22

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[ 0 : 00 ] This can be found in the White Bibles on page 1010. Again, the scripture text is Acts 4, verses 13 through 22 on page 1010 of the White Bibles.

Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished, and they recognized that they had been with Jesus. But seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another, saying, What shall we do with these men?

For that a notable sign has been performed through them is evident to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and we cannot deny it. But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more to anyone in this name.

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answered them, Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard.

[ 1 : 18 ] And when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people, for all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom this sign of healing was performed was more than 40 years old.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. You may be seated. Well, good morning and welcome to Holy Trinity Church.

If you are visiting today, we trust that you will see Jesus both in the people who are here and in the word that is now proclaimed in his name.

And as a result, we hope that you keep coming back and learning more and learning to live with one another here. The burden of the text before us today is that opening moment in verse 20.

For we cannot but speak. Of course, the text takes a little while to get there. But that is the burden of the text.

[ 2 : 27 ] For we cannot but speak. Christianity surprises.

I was thinking of John Bunyan earlier today whose book, Pilgrim's Progress, an allegory, but yet written not only with literary eloquence, but with an absolute command of the scriptures within them, from beginning to end, has astounded the world.

Outside the Bible, I am told that John Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress has been printed more than any other volume. That said, Bunyan, out of Bedford, England, was born in relative obscurity and had very little education or training.

They would say today, probably, that he never really went beyond the second grade. So how is it that a man who would write a book that would be published, in the English language anyway, more often than any other book outside the scriptures, actually obtains eloquence and a command of the scriptures?

Bunyan himself said of his own background, My father's house being of that rank that's meanest and most despised of all the families in the land.

[ 4 : 10 ] His father was a tinker, a blacksmith, a son of a working father rises. Well, the reason is simply this.

Christianity surprises. Christianity, by nature, is an education. And the same thing is true in the opening two verses of our text.

The impression that Peter and John made on the court that they had just testified before indicated that it surprised those who heard the message.

Look at verse 13 and 14. You'll see the two ways in which it surprised the listeners. First, now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John and perceived that they were uneducated, common men,

they were astonished.

And they recognized that they had been with Jesus, but seeing the man who was healed standing beside them, they had nothing to say in opposition.

[ 5 : 20 ] Those are the surprises in the text. Astonished, which gave way to being speechless. Take a look at this idea of being astonished.

This was a sermon delivered by Peter in the presence we saw last week of probably 70 to 80 religious leaders who had all, all been schooled in the best of the private institutions concerning the scriptures.

And yet we saw last week that Peter, with a deafness of biblical clarity, brought a text as evidence to the people from Psalm 118 about the stone that had been rejected by the builders and laid that evidence at the feet of those to whom he was preaching.

It was, had to be, one of the most astounding moments in preaching. Because preaching is in the preaching. And Peter had given it to them on that day.

These are men, then, that suddenly were seen as being bold and learned. You know, it's one thing to be bold.

[ 6 : 43 ] It's another thing to be learned. It's one thing to ask your passion to do all the heavy lifting. It's quite another thing to have the substance of that which ought to be driving passion actually be the converting power of what is said.

And so these men were bold, and yet obviously they were untrained. Now to have been educated in that day would have been one of two means by which you were educated.

Either a private instructor would have reared you pedagogically in the Greco-Roman world of rhetoric and learning.

We're not that far beyond in our text. The great Roman orator Cicero, who laid forth what it really took to persuade people.

And he actually laid out *inventio* as the first element of persuasion where you had to learn how to make an argument. You couldn't just get up and hope to woo everybody by your emotion or your tears.

[ 7 : 57 ] No, you needed to be able to make an argument. And that gave way to *dispositio*, which is in a sense the arrangement of your material. You had to be able to arrange things in a way that actually was orderly and could be followed and was persuasive as a result of its arrangement.

Which gave way to *elucutio*, which was your illustrative style. Not just your way behind the lectern, but the things you were drawing on.

The words you were using. The style which conveyed a way to move forward in your argument. And then, beyond all that, which is very unusual today, you had to memorize your work.

No eight-page manuscripts behind the lectern. No turning of folio documents and three-ring binders. It had to be completely memorized.

And we've already seen that from Peter's sermons, both before the thousands on Pentecost Sunday, and then before the 70 year, there was no time for putting it all together.

[ 9 : 10 ] Which is why in both instances it says he was really speaking, being filled with the Holy Spirit. He was speaking what looked like extemporaneously, but it had a certain argument.

It had an unbelievable arrangement. It had an illustrative style that was potent. It was indeed memorized. And then finally, the actual delivery of it was forceful.

I mean, we saw last week, he looked them straight in the eye from standing freely before them and said, This Jesus whom you crucified.

I mean, the power of this message indicated that he had all the tools of being educated. And yet the scriptures say they perceived they were uneducated common men.

Why? How is that possible? Because Christianity surprises. Because Christianity by nature educates.

[ 10 : 15 ] And even if they hadn't ever been schooled in Greco-Roman rhetoric and the power of persuasion, which they had not been. They also weren't schooled in the Hebrew scriptures.

They didn't grow up going to catechism. Or, we've heard one reference today of the Roman Catholic Church. These boys weren't 12 years wearing plaid.

That's a humorous remark by me. They had none of this. They had none of the private education that was religious. So they weren't from the public universities.

They weren't from the private religious institutions. They had none of it. They were fishermen. But you and I need to know that Christianity surprises. That is the force and weight of verses 13 and 14. Not only were these men then astonished, but they were speechless. And I'll tell you why they were speechless. You know, there are three elements to persuasion in kind of the trivium.

[11:19] There's the logos, which is actually the words you use. There's the ethos, which is the actual credibility of the person speaking. And there's the pathos, which is the emotive force.

Now, in our day, churches all over the world are relying on pathos, whether you have any logos or ethos. But look what the text says here.

They actually saw, verse 14, seeing the man who was healed standing beside them. They had nothing to say. Why were they speechless? Because the preachers had ethos.

Credibility. He's right here. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus. I think that's obvious when you look back at Luke's rendition of Jesus' final moments, when he stood before this same select group on the evening of his betrayal, and then moving toward the next day, Good Friday.

Jesus himself used in those final days in the temple teaching an allusion from Psalm 118 in their presence as well.

[12:30] So they had already seen Jesus use Psalm 118 to indicate those are rejecting the Messiah like the builders rejecting the corner, the stone.

And they had seen Jesus preach this passage in their midst. And so Peter now comes, and they're like, Oh, he'd been with Jesus. The last time we went into the church service of these itinerant men, we heard a sermon from Psalm 118, and today we're hearing it again.

And so all of this began to fall on the listeners, and you can only say, Christianity surprises. And it had an ethos that was undeniable.

Good things had happened. What's the second thing the text yields? Well, in verses 15 through 17, not only does Christianity surprise, but governing authorities have the capacity to suppress.

Governing authorities have the capacity to suppress. Did you notice what happened there at that turn of the verse? The preaching of Peter and John give way to the private deliberation of the governing authorities.

[13:51] Take a look at verse 15. But when they had commanded them to leave the council, they conferred with one another. In other words, they went into closed conference.

The inquest was over. Those who had had to give response to this work that had occurred were dismissed. Some man stood at the door and shut it, and now they went into private deliberation. This is the private deliberation of a court. These men had real authority over the civil and religious life of the community. And notice the question that took place.

Verse 16. I love the question they raise. Saying to one another, What shall we do with these men? Wow, that'll preach. I mean, look at the movement of the text from where we were last week in verse 7 to where we are this week with that question in verse 16.

[14:59] In verse 7, the question was to them, By what power or by what name do you do this? But now the question is, What shall we do with these men?

As a friend put it to me this week in discussing on this text, the question moves like this. From, How did you do this?

To, How will we handle you as a result of this? That's the deliberation.

When the name of Jesus, the name of Jesus, the name of Jesus, begins to be the governing center of gravity for the work that the church is doing, There will be, always, throughout this incident and throughout all ages, those who have authority and power and they will have to deliberate among themselves.

Now what are we going to do with them? That's what they began to ask. And take a look at the resolution that they adopted.

[16:23] The resolution is right there. There, in verse 17, But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to speak no more in the name of Jesus.

You see, the facts of what had happened were indisputable. God was at work doing good things in the lives of people, attributed to the name of Jesus, which displaced the authorities in their understanding of the law, and reattached the people, the masses, to these itinerant, uneducated fishermen who now looked both learned and persuasive.

And they begin to suppress it. There it is. That's the resolution adopted in their minutes. If we had the ability to go back and read the record, that's what it says.

Somebody, where's the clerk of the session? But in order that it may spread no further among the people, let us warn them to no more speak to anyone in this name.

Same thing's going on today. Even now, in places, it's unlawful to become a Christian.

[ 17 : 47 ] Even now, it's unlawful or unwanted to have Christians speak of their faith in Christ. even now, no matter where you go, you find people wanting to suppress the name of Jesus and therefore silencing those who are trying to lift his name up.

And it happens overtly, covertly. There is almost a blanketing, emerging, weight resting on the Western world that would begin to quiet the church on Jesus.

We see it across so many fronts. In recent Senate confirmation hearings, both Roman Catholic Christians and Protestant believers have been deemed unfit by some to serve our country do the convictions that they have on record about Jesus.

There's a fear that's afoot. And the fear concerns the views of Jesus. And on those grounds, people would want them quieted or at least not utilized for the welfare of the common good.

Our public institutions in general, both private and public, whether you're in a private university or you're in a public school for that instance. There are closed door sessions going on by those who have governing authority and they are deliberating the question, what will we do with them?

[ 19 : 49 ] And what's happening increasingly around us is you almost begin to feel the moisture, the humidity of all those unseen, unheard conversations.

There is an air, or the air of verbal witness to Jesus is moving toward being inaudible. there is a muffling of his name so that ironically, we feel it socially.

You're in a restaurant and there's tables near you and when it comes to a spiritual conversation, you almost feel as though you need to lower the voice, especially if Jesus is the subject of what we're speaking about.

You can't be in third grade today without already sensing the unwritten code towards silence. If you're a high school student here today, you know exactly what I'm talking about.

You go to class, subject matter comes up, discussion about this, that, or the other, and you begin to know, wow, I go to church on Sunday with my family but come Monday through Saturday with my friends, I have got to learn how to lay low in the weeds, like a big old large mouth bass.

[ 21 : 27 ] And I'm not coming out when anything gets pulled across. I don't know if you've ever seen the movie Hunt for Red October, but the sense, or at least one of those movies, I remember the submarines that are down in the water feeling the weight of those who are watching and looking for them, and they cut all the motors off so that the submarine just kind of goes silently through the waters, and all those who are in that sub, as crazy as they were to get on there to begin with, mind you, but all those who are in there suddenly don't even speak.

and the whole thing calls for quietness as the authorities pass by in the waters.

In other words, we've become to think that our entire lives depend upon silence. I want to talk about this because not only does Christianity surprise, or authorities suppress, but let's get to the burden of the text, 18 through 22.

They move out of private session, and you're going to see the privileged necessity for Christians to speak. There it is.

So they called them and charged them not to speak or teach at all in the name of Jesus, but Peter and John answered them.

[ 23 : 07 ] Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge. In other words, I understand you have verdicts and things to record in your minutes about what your authority actually indicates itself over me, but whatever you do with that is what you're going to do with it, but whether from our perspective it's right for us to follow the divine dictum of things that we've actually seen or heard or actually conformed to the silence that my world necessitates, well that's for you to judge.

But, but for, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard. That's where this text is moving.

If you're a third grader here today, or an octogenarian, Christianity is the most wonderful surprise in the world. It by nature will educate you.

But as it is, by nature, given the world in which we live, it will try to be suppressed among you. And the privileged necessity of the Christian is to speak.

Is to speak. Now I know this goes against, you know, St. Francis of Assisi's wonderful little thing, you know what I'm talking about, some of you. You know, do all the good you can, at all the times you can, in any way you can, and if by necessity you got to use words, well then do it.

[ 24 : 46 ] That's not what's going on here in the New Testament record in the book of Acts. But that is what's going on in Protestant, I'll just say Protestant churches today, in this country.

There's a displacement within Protestantism to do all kinds of good. But God help me if I actually have to say anything about Jesus.

Now there's all kinds of reasons for that. God to do the blood of Abel to the blood of Jesus. The blood of Abel cries out for justice from the ground until this day.

But the writer to the Hebrews says there is a word, there is a blood, there is something actually more precious than simply justice in regard to the world's understanding of it.

For indeed the gospel is actually God's execution of justice on his own son. But the writer to the Hebrews is clear. We have a better blood, the blood of Jesus.

[ 26 : 04 ] And if you are simply speaking to the common good and for justice without ever declaring Jesus, then you have not yet activated what I'm calling the privileged necessity that these men felt on that day.

It was privileged. It was privileged. I get to say something of Jesus in the public forum. It was of necessity because God has actually done something in Jesus.

And to not speak, to be silent on Jesus, but to be verbal on everything else, is to put you almost incoherently somewhere in the book of Acts.

And so I'm telling you today, without emotion, you've got to start using the name of Jesus.

You cannot float through this life like that submarine trying to escape all the ping, ping, pings of purported disasters that would come to you by uttering his name.

[ 27 : 41 ] I have thought about this text this week, and I feel in my spirit that this is one of the most important messages I've been given to proclaim in a long time.

Christians have a privileged necessity to speak the name of Jesus wherever they go.

people now notice I'm about done. They indicated this before they knew what the outcome would be.

Now you and I, if I can navigate what the outcome will be, then I'm going to do it. See, we want everything secure before we begin to go verbal.

But they indicate we're going verbal before they knew the outcome. And look at this, they had two previous things that had occurred in their recent past that indicated possible outcomes.

[ 28 : 54 ] John 9, there's a man born blind, Jesus heals, he actually is brought before the ruling body, and what happened to him when he began to say, you don't even know how I got my sight, I'm just telling you, I don't even know the guy, but it's Jesus.

And you know what they did to him? It says they put him out. That doesn't mean they told him to go home, they excommunicated him from the religious family of which all the promises to Israel were meant to be.

In other words, they threw him out the door without hope. Excommunication is something they knew from their past. Secondly, they knew execution had happened to Jesus.

Because when Jesus actually stands before them and they ask him, well, are you the Christ? And he says, well, you have said that I am. They actually go, we don't need anything else.

blasphemy is the charge. And they've seen excommunication on one hand, they've seen execution on the other hand. And now the question is, do they need to navigate their professional life in such a way as to relieve them from either one before they speak?

[ 29 : 58 ] And what they say is, I don't know the outcome. I don't know where this may go. But whether it's right for me to listen to you, you do what you're going to do, but I am going to speak about Jesus.

Now, get me straight. Don't go out of this door today and make a fool of yourself. Don't go out and just like, I'm here to do Jesus at my job, although you should be there to do Jesus.

Don't be offensive to people, but get verbal when the opportunity is right.

not knowing the cost. And if you get tossed, well, come back next week.

You'll find that the Christian community took care of their own. You're going to lose your job? Well, come back here and say, Pastor Helm, I lost my job on this. First thing I'm going to say is, well, were you stupid?

[ 30 : 59 ] Were you a fool? Were you foolish? You say, no, I wasn't foolish at all. I was careful. I was deliberate. I was winsome. I was gracious. But I did say something about Jesus.

And they said, well, then you're no longer employed here. Well, then I'll call the, you know, we're going to take a deacon offering today. You know what the deacon offering is for today? It's for the physical needs of those in our body who have need.

That's the deal. That's the deal. Holy Trinity, Hyde Park. If you, over the next ten years, should suffer for rightly, not wrongly, for rightly, just trying to work out Jesus in the world in which you live, and you lose everything, then you come knocking on our door.

Wow. I just started wondering here how many people are going to call me and want to become a member. Be like, I've got to become a member before I go verbal. Let me say this though.

Where, where does that boldness come from? These men, at this moment in the text, knew that they were loved by God.

[ 32 : 26 ] they knew that they had been united to Christ and they knew that they were indwelt by the power of the Spirit. So this wasn't some kind of go suck it up, work it up, figure it out, launch out in some crazy, no, no.

In other words, they spoke Jesus because they knew they were loved by God, united to Christ, indwelt by the Spirit.

Spirit. And so it actually, the verbal testimony of the church began to take wing on the strength of the Holy Spirit rather than on the external conformity of what they were going to go accomplish.

And it happened extemporaneously. It happened in the moment. Suddenly, I found myself speaking of Jesus. Amen?

So don't think that this is something that's done by human effort. You can't do this in your own strength. Their boldness was a consequence of their being filled.

[ 33 : 35 ] So be filled with the Holy Spirit. Secondly, what will happen as a result of this, that was their response.

But notice the text. There was a certain fearlessness in them and a certain faithfulness by them. Verse 21, when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding no way to punish them because of the people.

For all were praising God for what had happened. For the man on whom the sign of healing was performed was more than 40 years old. They were fearless. They were fearless.

fearless. Even though they received further threats, which I'm guessing probably dealt with ecclesiastical threats. They dealt with, watch your back or you're not going to have any voice around here.

You're not going to be able to enter into the temple. But notice what happens over in chapter 5, verse 12, just peek across the thing. Stunning follow-up. Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles and they were all together where?

[ 34 : 43 ] In Solomon's portico. These guys didn't just leave and go, well, we'll do Jesus out in the open air. They left and came right back to the place of the crime where they got arrested.

They're like, no, I'm doing Jesus right here. I mean, that's fearless. And they were faithful. We'll get there next week, come back. But let me just say this, lips that kiss the sun will have words to say about the sun.

They were faithful. Let me put it to you this way. You cannot be faithful to God and be silent about Jesus. Not going to happen.

If you're in junior high, not going to happen. You cannot be faithful to God and silent about Jesus. You in high school, you cannot be faithful to God and be silent about Jesus.

Are you gainfully employed somewhere in the city? You cannot be faithful to God and silent about Jesus. Are you a student? You cannot be faithful to God and be silent about Jesus.

[ 35 : 54 ] will be faithful to God and will be faithful to God and be faithful to God and be faithful to God. Well, that's going to call for what happens next, but you've got to come back next week.

Our Heavenly Father, we thank you for these stunning truths that Christianity does surprise, and we acknowledge that in many places it's suppressed way beyond where we are.

So help us with our minimal inconveniences of speaking of you to faithfully do so. In Jesus' name  
we pray.  
Amen.