

SERMON: "BIBLE BASICS – ACTS"

TEXTS: NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 2:14, 37-47
NEW TESTAMENT ACTS 8:26-40 & 9:1-19

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INTRODUCTION

How bold is your faith? And what does that boldness look like?

That is the question I'd ask you to wrestle with as we take a big picture look at Acts

Whole lot of boldness in this book! The image on the screen is from Acts 4
from when they were threatened by the powers that be, they prayed for boldness
Boldness is the common thread that runs through the story of the early church

We have much to learn from their experiences and examples
That has always been the case, for the Church throughout its history
But is especially so now because we are in the middle of a reformation

I've heard multiple church leaders talk about how the Church (capital C)
seems to have a major rummage sale every 500 years or so
Take everything out of the house, put it in the yard, sell some of it
give some of it away, take some back in the house
give some of it to your kids ... who wants a sliver tea service?

That's where we are these days. Can be kind of scary, enough that some of us
try to go back even though we know we cannot. It can also be exciting
God is doing new things in a new way for a new day, a reformation.
The tomb is still empty! Jesus is on the loose and up to something!

I think the road map for the reformation God's got going on can be found in Acts
It is a good idea to go back to our roots, to the story of the early Church,
in order to go forward as a church – reformed and always being reformed

I am convinced that the Church of the 21st century will NOT look like the church
of the 20th century but will instead look more like the Church of the 1st century.
And that not only is that okay ... it is God's will

The church of not too long ago was a comfortable place, maybe even content
It, honestly, did not take much to be and do church. It was, for many of us,
the norm. It was just what everyone did. It didn't really challenge us that much
Boldness was not really a word that would be used to describe that church

But the Church of the first century. They needed boldness
Being an American Christian in the 20th century meant being the same,
fitting in. The Church of the 1st century meant being different, sticking out
Sure seems to me we are heading that way – we need to be different
different like the early Church was different.

LESSONS FROM THE FIRST CENTURY

What made them different was their trust in the power and presence of the Spirit
Our opening hymn told the story of Acts, chapter one – Jesus' ascension
What really grounds and guides the whole book is chapter two – Pentecost,
when the disciples receive power from on high, the Holy Spirit

Show image – Pentecost

The Holy Spirit gives the early Church the boldness they did not have on their own
They were all together, waiting for that promised power. Luke, who wrote both
the gospel according to Luke and Acts sets up the beginning of volume two (Acts)
with how he ends volume one (Luke) in chapter 24, verse 49

**And see I am sending upon you what my Father promised; so stay
here in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high**

The first story in Acts I want you to see is a description of the early church
This is when they receive that power at Pentecost. And this is what happens
after Peter speaks to the crowd telling them about Jesus crucified and risen

**Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter
and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said
to them, “Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of
Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven, and you will receive
the gift of the Holy Spirit.**

People responded to the good news of Jesus Christ
They did then. Verse 41 tells us about 3000 people were added that day
People today also respond well to the good news of Jesus Christ,
crucified and risen, especially when we stick to talking about Jesus
and not slip into moralizing and acting all holier than thou

The description of the early church continues describing how they were together
The ate together, devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and prayer
They shared what they had, had all things in common.
Sounds like “A Place for Everyone”

The description ends the way it began – with people being added
“and day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved”
That welcome, that openness, begins and ends this description of the early Church
It is emphasized because it is critical to the health of the Church then and now
The Church has to be open, has to be welcoming

And that kind of openness and welcome ... it takes boldness
I remember a great documentary on PBS “From Jesus to Christ:
The First Christians” They talked about why the early church grew
Two reasons – they practiced radical hospitality and they cared for
the poor, the broken, the sick, the dead and the dying.

HOSPITALITY ON THE GO

I want you to see that 'radical hospitality' in their openness at Pentecost and throughout Acts. That hospitality meant and means being open to all Where people came from, the language they spoke, their social status All the categories they used, that we use ... They're not barriers anymore

This kind of hospitality is not a salad bar with all the ingredients in their own container This isn't a melting pot either where all the ingredients are cooked down and diluted until it is all some tasteless grey mush served over white bread

This is a recipe that incorporates the beauty and bounty of all the ingredients that mixes them together so each adds something unique to the dish something tasty, something spicy, something that pairs well with ranch dressing It's a recipe for togetherness that is both 'at home' and 'to go'

Show image – Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch

We see that kind of hospitality in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian Eunuch It is not just about welcoming someone in ... it is about reaching out

Then an angel of the Lord said to Philip, "Get up and go toward the south to the road that goes down from Jerusalem to Gaza." (This is a wilderness road.) So he got up and went. Now there was an Ethiopian eunuch, a court official of the Candace, the queen of the Ethiopians, in charge of her entire treasury. He had come to Jerusalem to worship and was returning home; seated in his chariot, he was reading the prophet Isaiah. Then the Spirit said to Philip, "Go over to this chariot and join it." So Philip ran up to it and heard him reading the prophet Isaiah. He asked, "Do you understand what you are reading?" He replied, "How can I, unless someone guides me?" And he invited Philip to get in and sit beside him.

One thing we might miss in this story is how busy the Spirit is giving directions An angel tells Philip to get on the road heading south to Gaza The Spirit tells him to approach the chariot. The Spirit is directing this act And the Spirit directs Philip to this man, to this particular man

The Spirit leads this Jewish follower of Jesus to someone from Ethiopia Not a fellow Jew. Not a fellow countryman. An African And a word to those who believe that being a faithful Christian means thinking of people who are LGTBQ as greater sinners than anyone else ... Philip is being sent, by the Holy Spirit, to a eunuch, a sexual minority

And a word about how bold our faith is?

How bold does one have to be to stick to a circle of folks who look and think like them? How bold does one have to be to guard that circle to keep people out? And how bold does one need to be to grow that circle, to reach out? How bold is your faith?

SUMMARY

Another way to ask that question would be to ask how risky is your faith?

The last story we'll look at is a familiar story that features one of my very favorite people in the bible – Ananias. He's not the lead in this drama ... but he is the hero

Show image of Paul & Ananias

Ananias is the person the Lord appears to in a vision and is called to take a risk

He is being called to go to Saul, the religious leader who has been out to get followers of Jesus. Ananias is being called to reach out to a dangerous man

He is reasonable in saying to God something akin to 'you want me to do what?'

But Ananias answered, "Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem, and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name."

Ananias voices his concern, legitimate concern ... but he goes

He is the one that helps Saul regain his sight. He is the one who heals a man who could have, and probably would have, hurt him given the chance

Ananias was a healer, a bridgebuilder, a peacemaker

No, not everyone is called to follow Ananias lead

Not everyone needs to take that risk, be that bold

But back to that PBS documentary ... can you find a way to be bold?

Can you practice a hospitality that not only says "come on in" but also reaches out, out beyond our own circles?

Can you, like Ananias, touch the brokenness of this world?

Can you build a bridge instead of wall?

Can you be a peacemaker?

We are in the midst of great reformation

God is at work doing these things ...

healing our hurts, building bridges, making peace.

I pray you not only see it

I pray you are, in your own unique way, a part of it

Might I be so bold as to suggest that the full name of this book,

The Acts of the Apostles is not a 'once upon a time' tale

It is a working title for a book we are helping write

a book about the ongoing work the Spirit is sending us out to do

should we be so bold as to follow the Spirit's lead