

BOLDLY!

Acts 5:27-32

John 20:19-31

There is a word in the English language that is an important part of today's sermon. The word is "tepid". If you are not familiar with this word, it means: "showing little enthusiasm, unenthusiastic, apathetic, half-hearted, indifferent, listless".

Feeling or acting tepid doesn't mean you are AGAINST something. On the contrary, it means you are FOR something, in an unenthusiastic way. Preachers know this as the word "nice"; as in "that sermon today was, er, um, nice". Tepid!

Keep that in mind for a bit while I remind you of part of our Epistle reading for today, specifically verses 27-29: *"When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority."*

You remember who this is, right? This is Peter...fisherman Peter. "Redneck" Peter. "I don't know Him" Peter. Please keep that in mind as well for a bit...

Last week we celebrated the biggest surprise the world has ever known. Jesus Christ, arrested, tortured, and executed in plain sight, surprised everyone by defeating death and escaping alive from the tomb. This single, astonishing event changed human history forever, but it also set in motion a series of amazing events and adventures that Luke, the author of the Gospel of that name, recorded in his second book, the book we call the Acts of the Apostles, or simply "Acts".

During Holy Week we saw Jesus' disciples become so intimidated and terrified by the horror of watching what their rabbi went through on His journey to the cross that they scattered in fear. And, let's face it, who could blame them?

Oh, it's easy to sit somewhere in a safe pew in a pretty room and think "Yeah, I could have done better" with perfect hindsight. But, really; they knew that even to associate with Jesus during this terrible week could mean a cross for them as well.

Peter in particular was scared into denying Jesus in His greatest hour of need, just as Jesus had predicted. Far from being an isolated event, this is the same Peter who doubted Jesus when He told him, (after a long night of unsuccessful fishing) to try throwing the nets out on the other side of the boat.

The same Peter who, with the other disciples, told Jesus to send five thousand people home from a hillside because there just wasn't enough to feed all of them.

Can you even begin to imagine Peter's surprise when there were nets full of fish, people full of food (and twelve baskets left over!), and then, finally and most importantly, the tomb empty of the body of his Lord and Savior. God surprised Peter again and again by doing the impossible, the wonderfully unexpected, the miraculous.

Of course, the result of all this is really not surprising, is it?

In today's Epistle reading we meet Peter again, but this is not the fearful Peter, the doubting Peter or the "tepid" Peter. Today's story picks up as the apostles have begun to boldly proclaim the news about the resurrection and as a result they are thrown in prison. But during the night, an angel releases them and tells them to go and publicly share the Good News right in the temple court!

This is NOT the actions of a tepid follower! This is the boldest possible move: they have been arrested by the high priest, but they return to the public center of religious activity and do again what they were arrested for doing. Instead of running away or hiding, Peter and the others are faithful to obey what God as told them to do and then stand up to the high priest and the other leaders.

When confronted with doing exactly what they've been told NOT to do, Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings!"

Talk about a turnaround! There is NOTHING tepid about Peter now!

From running away from the cross to standing in the temple courts telling the story of the resurrection, Peter has been surprised by God for so long he's learned a lesson - that you can bet God will ALWAYS surprise you! No matter how grim the circumstances look, God always has something in store.

Peter has learned to expect that from God, to place his trust in God, and now lives his life as a reflection of that trust and it has turned him into a new person.

No longer tepid, tentative or questioning in his faith, Peter has become an example of a complete turnaround in faith. Peter has given up tepid for BOLD! Do you find that surprising? If so, why?

Let's face it, sometimes the unexpected work of God in our lives leads us to surprise even ourselves.

Have you ever surprised yourself by acting in faith instead of in fear?

Have you ever had the experience of KNOWING, without a doubt, that this action is what you are called to do?

That this stand the one you are called to take?

Making that leap, from tepid to bold is the mark of a person growing in faith. It is the mark of a follower who has come to understand that God leads us to lean on His unseen potential for surprise rather than to obey the seen expectations of this world.

And it is one of the most challenging...and rewarding leaps we will ever make.

Friends let's face it; far too many followers of Christ have a tepid faith. A "nice" faith.

Or, even worse, there are those who proclaim a "bold" faith that is little more than a weaponized form of Christianity.

You know that ones:

They proclaim that the Ten Commandments of the Old Testament should blazoned in public places,

But totally ignore the Beatitudes of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount.

They proclaim that Paul's writing to a troubled church in Corinth about the role of women in that congregation is infallible doctrine,

But somehow find that Jesus' teaching to "love your enemy" is so nuanced that it is almost impossible to understand.

They have become so enamored with attempts to describe who God HATES, that they have turned their back on the compassionate Christ.

Please, please, don't confuse these people with the Christian faith, especially not with the BOLD faith that relies on the constant unfolding of God's creation.

Unfortunately, the world finds it easy to become confused with what it means to "be" Christian:

Bombing abortion clinics or attempting to kill doctors who are acting in a manner that is both legal and ethical? Check!

A willingness, even eagerness to treat people who are different as ALWAYS a threat? Check!

An innate belief that THEY and they alone are the fair children of God? Check!

There is no room in the Christian faith for the "Christian bully"! That's NOT bold faith, that's prejudice, bigotry, small-mindedness and hatred wrapped in a holier-than-thou attitude.

Compare that with what we KNOW to be the description of those living BOLD in their Christian faith:

Struggling to grow in your faith? That's OK, you will be blessed!

Seeking to live a humble example of your faith? That's fine, you will be blessed!

Trying as hard as you can to live God's will? Perfect, God will satisfy you!

Do you seek to show mercy to ALL of God's children? God will show you mercy beyond all understanding!

Are you trying, even if you fall short, trying to live in an inclusive harmony with all of God's children? YOU are the BOLD children of the Most High!

That is the sum of Peter's words for us today. This faith, this Christian faith, is NOT about being tepid and unsure, even as it is NOT about anger, vengeance, political posturing or exclusion!

It IS about Boldly Going ... "We must obey God..."

The just, loving, merciful, inclusive, surprising God, author of all creation, creator of every living child on this good earth, who in compassion and ultimate sacrifice allowed His Son to die, that we might have life and life eternal, THAT God speaks to us!

Not as tepid followers, nor as ones who have confused anger or hatred for righteousness, but as believers, challenged to grow BOLD in our faith.

“We must obey God...” Those were Peter’s words.
And our benediction

AMEN