

Emmanuel Ev. Lutheran Church—Wisconsin Evangelical Lutheran Synod  
Fourth Sunday of Easter  
April 22, 2018  
Sermon by Pastor Justin Gran  
**Speak boldly**  
—Acts 4:23-33

“Stop it. Just stop. Stop talking about Jesus. You keep saying how Jesus is the Son of God. Stop it. Just keep it to yourself. You keep talking about how he died on a cross and then was raised back to life. That’s crazy. Stop spreading that rumor. You keep talking about how he is the Savior of all people, the only Savior. That’s enough. We don’t believe it so stop touting that teaching! You’re causing trouble by imposing your beliefs on everyone else, stop it. If you don’t stop talking about Jesus there will be some serious repercussions. So just stop it. Ok?”

The conversation probably went something like that. In the verses just before our lesson from Acts, Peter and John, who had been arrested, stood before the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling authorities) because they healed a crippled man, but even worse they were preaching and teaching in the name Jesus Christ. The council’s ruling for Peter and John: “Stop it. Just stop. Stop talking about Jesus, or else there will be some serious repercussions.” That’s open opposition against the gospel of Jesus Christ. It’s open opposition against those who believe and confess Jesus Christ. It’s open opposition against Jesus Christ himself.

After Peter and John were commanded to stop preaching in the name of Jesus, and threatened, they were released. Upon their release, they returned to their brothers and sisters in the faith to report what had happened. And what could they do in light of that open opposition? Well they could have done a number of things. They could have taken off running like they did on the night Jesus was betrayed. Peter could have denied any involvement with Jesus like he did a few months earlier in the high priest’s courtyard. They could have crossed their arms and said, “Fine! They don’t want to hear about Jesus, then they can rot in hell.” But what did they actually do in response to such blatant and open opposition? They prayed to God for openness and boldness on their part to talk about Jesus. They trusted in and relied on the very one for whom and because of whom they were facing opposition.

What do you do when you encounter opposition against Jesus and his word? Well, first of let’s clarify. Do we, Christians in America today face opposition for what we believe. Absolutely! There’s no denying that. The world continues to rage against Jesus. But at the same time we don’t want to be naïve and say, “Peter and John getting locked up and flogged for talking about Jesus; that’s the same thing as my cousin rolling his eyes every time I drop a Jesus hint.” Or, “There are Christians in the Middle East getting blown up for what they believe, and here people get ridiculed in the workplace or don’t get the promotion—it’s the same thing.” No it’s not. I can stand here publicly today and preach these truths about Jesus and I’m pretty confident that I won’t get arrested on my way home later today. I can post a Bible passage on Facebook and it will likely ruffle some feathers. However, it likely won’t result in me and my family getting dragged out of our house to be publicly shamed or even worse. The persecution we encounter today in our time and place is not exactly the same as the persecution of Christians in different places or in different centuries.

But don’t be fooled. A subtler opposition against Jesus and his gospel is opposition nonetheless. Maybe no one has personally told you, “Stop it! Stop talking about Jesus.” But have you ever respectfully been told, “Well, that’s what you believe and I respect that, but I think there are many paths to God whether it’s Jesus or Allah or Buddha.” That’s opposition to Jesus and all that he has done to save. Maybe no one has told you to stop imposing your Christian beliefs on others, but we do live in an age where people have no problem imposing their godless, sinful ideas on us. Those who oppose Jesus Christ don’t just want us to put up with their sinful lifestyle, but they want us to embrace it and accept it, and if we don’t we’re in the wrong. Opponents of the gospel may be even so bold as to use the name of Jesus to validate a sin and unbelief. For example, last fall in teen Bible study looked at all sorts of bumper stickers that expressed a particular belief. One student had seen a bumper sticker that said, “Jesus would slap you.” The other bumper stickers on the car made it pretty clear the individual supported some clearly unchristian beliefs. And if you didn’t share the same tolerant false beliefs, Jesus would slap you if he were around today. Yes the world continues to rage against Jesus Christ, the Lord’s anointed.

What do you do when this opposition becomes evident? Well, we could and we probably have done a number of different things. Maybe instead of speaking boldly about Jesus, we adopt milder less offense speech that the opponents use, “Well, this is what I personally believe about Jesus” as though it’s just one opinion... I’m guilty of that. Another tempting way we might deal with opposition to the gospel is to cross our arms and say, “Fine, if that’s what they want to believe, I guess they’ll find out the hard way. At least I gave it the college try.” When you’ve sensed even potential opposition that could arise, have you prematurely shaken the dust off your feet? “Well they probably won’t want to hear what I have to say about Jesus. Why bother?” But what troubles me the most isn’t the times I’ve piped down in the face of opposition. It’s all

the times I've faced no opposition at all, because Jesus' name didn't cross my lips when it really should have. I can almost see Jesus' broken-hearted glance to Peter when Peter denied his Lord.

The problem isn't simply that I haven't always spoken boldly about my Savior. Even more so, it's that I haven't always believed boldly in my Savior. Do you want to speak boldly like Peter and the other apostles did? Then do as Peter and the others did, repent and believe in Jesus, boldly, confidently. Yes at times they dealt with opposition sinfully and so have we. But by the grace of Jesus Christ who died and rose for them and us, he didn't take his gospel of forgiveness away. And so when opposition rolled around again, instead of running away from Jesus, they ran to him. They trusted in and relied on the very one for whom and because of whom they were facing opposition. Their bold confidence in Christ showed itself in their prayer.

First they prayed, ***“Sovereign Lord, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them.”*** God, you made everything and have power and control over everything, and yet we can come to you in boldness and openness and call you “Dad.” Believe that, boldly.

Then they prayed, ***“You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David: ‘Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.’*** By quoting this Psalm of David they recognized the reality of the opposition they faced. But they grasped the other awesome reality: this opposition against Jesus Christ and his church is real, but it's all in vain. Nothing can over power the Almighty. No persecution against Christ and his Christians will ever undo what Christ has done. Believe that, boldly.

Their prayer continues, ***“Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen.”*** Yes it is as David prophesied. Rulers and people gathered against Jesus. Yet what happened to Jesus was no unraveling of unfortunate events. It was by God's power and will that Jesus was put to death. Long before it happened, God willed that Jesus would one day die for your sins. God by his power placed himself into the hands of his conspirators so that your sins could be nailed to a cross and done away with for good. God wanted to suffer and die to grant you a relationship of peace and openness with God. And by his power he even raised Jesus from the dead so that this peace is certain. In the face of opposition, remember that and boldly believe it. When stricken by your conscience for the times you've stifled that message out of fear of opposition, boldly approach God's throne of grace and lay these an all your sins there, confident that in Christ they are forgiven.

And finally pray as Peter and John did, ***“Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform miraculous signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”*** In the face of opposition they prayed for the ability to speak the Word of God boldly and for God to perform miracles in Jesus' name. Isn't that what brought about the opposition in the first place? And yet they asked to speak with even more boldness in the name of Jesus Christ. Why? Because they believed, boldly and confidently, in Jesus Christ. Therefore they boldly and confidently spoke about Jesus Christ.

Yes, the world relentlessly opposes Jesus, and because we believe in Jesus the world relentlessly opposes us. So what do we do? We boldly trust in Jesus. Trying to do anything else is in vain. And because we believe boldly, we want to speak boldly. What does speaking boldly about Jesus sound like? It's not standing on a street corner angrily shouting at passer's by “Believe in Jesus Christ or be condemned!” It's not going out and dropping Jesus' name to pick a fight so you can win an argument. Bold speech about Jesus isn't done in an edgy, arrogant tone. Speaking about Jesus with great boldness is simply talking about Jesus openly. You can speak boldly, openly about Jesus like you talk openly about a close friend, someone you know well—after all Jesus isn't ashamed to call us friends. You can talk about Jesus openly and proudly like you talk about your spouse—after all Jesus says that every Christian is his dearly beloved bride—his pride and joy. Why not talk about Jesus the same way he talks about you. That would be bold.

Let's pray, “Lord help me to boldly believe in you so that I may boldly speak of you.” In Jesus' name Amen.