

The journey gets rough

[Acts 4:23-31; 5:25-40]

Series in Acts: Led by the Spirit – journeys into the unknown.

1. The journey begins.
2. The New Community.
3. Following the leader – JESUS.
4. **The Journey gets rough.**

[Has anyone else noticed that an Evangelical Taxi service has been started at Chiang Mai International airport? As we left the airport after our return from Bangkok on Wednesday there was a sign offering to take you "SAFE & SAVED" to where you want to go! Well, this sermon affirms that this is a journey for the saved but one that doesn't assure safety! Maybe you would decline a taxi ride that assured you of danger during the journey??! However much a taxi driver would like to tell me that I would be safe with him, if I was getting into a taxi at Baghdad airport I wouldn't expect to be **guaranteed** a safe trip...with more than a hint of analogy in that last sentence, let's begin!]

READ Acts 3:7-9; 4:1-4

Last week:

- *The crippled beggar healed*
- *Peter preaching to the crowd – "He was healed by the power of the risen Lord Jesus!"*
- *Peter and John arrested and put in jail*
- *Brought before the Sanhedrin (Jewish council), threatened & released.*

If 20th century Christians are to speak the truth for their sociohistorical situation, they cannot merely repeat the story of what Jesus did and said in Palestine, as if it were self-interpreting for us today. Truth is more than retelling the biblical story. Truth is the divine happening that invades our contemporary situation, revealing the meaning of the past for the present so that we are made new creatures for the future...Our commitment to divine truth...requires us to investigate the connection between Jesus' words and deeds...and our existence today.

James H. Cone IMAGING THE WORD Vol. 1

Truth is the divine happening that invades our contemporary situation, revealing the meaning of the past for the present so that we are made new creatures for the future...

That is what happened with the healing of the crippled beggar - this man who had been crippled since birth. When he went leaping and jumping and praising God around the temple courts to the astonishment of the onlookers – the truth of Jesus resurrection (the very recent past) from the dead was proclaimed!

That's what Peter told the astonished crowd that gathered: *"This is evidence that Jesus is alive! Jesus has healed this man!"*

This is what we are called to as well – to bring the evidence that Jesus is alive into our own contemporary situations: **"the meaning of the past for the present so that we are made new creatures for the future"**.

For the early church

- this demonstration of the risen life of Jesus,
- this preaching that Jesus had died for us and had been raised from the dead
- and these undeniable evidences of the power of God at work

were creating an opposition, an angry reaction. Those who felt most threatened – the religious leaders, didn't know how to contain this movement, or how to punish those leading it...so they released them with threats...

- This is the journey that is starting to get rough;
- there are potholes appearing in the road, rumours beginning to circulate that people could get injured or even die traveling this way;
- increasingly there is risk involved in making this journey...

→ How would these first Christians respond?

→ How do we respond when following Jesus and demonstrating his risen life get difficult?

READ Acts 4:21-31

When this first Christian community heard about the opposition, the trouble coming, the threats from those in authority, those with power...what did they do? They raised their voices together in prayer to God...

They pray to God Almighty, creator of heaven and earth...and when I read that prayer one word struck me. POWER. It says that when Jesus was crucified, what happened was what God ***in his power*** had decided

"They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen"

v.28

When Jesus died on the cross, the all powerful God became powerless...

WHY? so that we, in our powerlessness might have power by the Holy Spirit of God - the power of the life of Jesus!

When Jesus died on the cross, he adsorbed all the fury of evil, he carried all the weight of corruption and brokenness; he exhausted all the energy of God-opposing forces of wickedness so that you and I could be free from a life of sin, selfishness and death – by the power of his risen life!

GOD'S POWER became POWERLESSNESS

so that in our POWERLESSNESS we can know God's POWER

That's what leads them to conclude their prayer with these words: "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 servant Jesus."

The Christian life is a way of life that works opposite to the ways of the world!

- It's the way of Jesus who demonstrated God's power through powerlessness!
- God fills His followers with his Spirit, so that as we follow Jesus, our leader, he will demonstrate the power of His risen life in and through us.

During the past few weeks I have read Tom Wright's book, "SIMPLY CHRISTIAN" [described as a book that does for this generation what C.S.Lewis's "Mere Christianity" did for his. I highly recommend it]

From Tom Wright's book SIMPLY CHRISTIAN:

Moses goes up onto the mountain, and comes down with the law, the tablets of the covenant, God's gift to his people of the way of life by which they will be able to demonstrate that they really are his people.

This is the picture that we ought to have in mind as we read ACTS 2. The previous Passover, Jesus had died and been raised, opening the way out of slavery, the way to forgiveness and a new start for the whole world, more particularly for all who follow him. Now, 50 days later, Jesus has been taken into 'heaven', into God's dimension of reality; but, like Moses, he comes down again, to ratify the renewed covenant and to provide that way of life, written not on stone but in human hearts, by which Jesus' followers may gratefully demonstrate that they really are his people. That is the underlying theology by which the remarkable phenomenon of Pentecost as Luke tells it – the wind, the fire, the tongues, and the sudden, powerful proclamation of Jesus to the astonished crowds – is given its deepest meaning. **Those in whom the Spirit comes to dwell are to be people who live at the intersection between heaven and earth.**

*...this is a summary of his portrayal of the Christian worldview, that heaven is God's space and earth is ours, but there are these points of intersection – these points of overlap, between heaven and earth. As followers of Jesus we live life in this place of overlap between heaven and earth, we are called **to live the life of heaven while here on earth**. Despite this seeming extremely difficult at best, or even impossible, "normal Christianity" is all about finding how to sustain this kind of life and even grow in it.*

This is what this first Christian community is doing when they meet to pray...this is what they are praying about – HOW TO SUSTAIN THIS LIFE OF HEAVEN WHILE HERE ON EARTH.

This is how they use the scriptures, this quotation from Psalm 2 – as a new community they seek to live the life of heaven while here on earth!

→*The scriptures give them their right perspective*

→The scriptures give them the appropriate corrective against to threats and the anticipated persecution they were receiving

- God is sovereign
- Jesus Christ is LORD
- The resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the foundation of this faith

Just as these early Christians encouraged each other to live as points of intersection, points of overlap between heaven and earth – so should we; and so should we encourage the Thai church...in an atmosphere of irreconcilable differences between opposing parties, to be salt and light – to be peacemakers.

Just as these early Christians used the scriptures to live the life of heaven while here on earth, so should we, because this is our calling!

And this is what we do – at every LINC group, every men's bible study group, at every women's bible study group, at home, as routinely as we eat and sleep we should read the scriptures to keep us living the life of heaven while here on earth!

What does "living the life of heaven while here on earth" look like for our individual lives?

1 POINT: It is a life with boundaries. Because I am to live heaven on earth, therefore there are those things I say "NO" to. These are things I don't entertain; those things I don't allow thought space for, because they are "NO" things. Simple isn't it?

How is it possible to resist/ reject / keep myself clean?

Is it by own supreme effort? No, it is by the power of the Spirit of God – given to us so that we might live the life of heaven while here on earth.

What does "living the life of heaven while here on earth" look like for our community life? It's a life characterized by:

- KINDNESS
- ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCES
- UNITY
- FORGIVENESS
- SORRY
- GRACE
- PEACE – control of the tongue;
-
- Eph 4: "In your anger do not sin"
"Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God."
"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ forgave you."

This is a demonstration of the life of heaven here on earth!

[P.S. our church vision statement fits perfectly into this description of the Christian worldview. If we as Christians are to 'Live the life of heaven while here on earth', then yes, we "Embrace our world with the heart of God"! By our own efforts? Impossible! **By the power of the Holy Spirit.**]

See Acts 5:25-42

- the apostles demonstrate the power of God, in miracles and signs
- they're arrested and jailed again
- they're released by an angel who tells them to "Go – stand – proclaim!"
- when they do this the apostles are once again brought before the High priest and all the Jewish council again
 - o "We told you not to do this! You are blaming us for this man's death"
 - o "We must obey God rather than men!" was their reply. "Jesus has been raised from the dead. He has been exalted to God's right hand as Prince and Saviour so that he might give repentance and forgiveness to Israel...We are witnesses of these things, **and so is the Holy Spirit** whom God has given to those who obey him."
- they were furious and wanted to put them to death

What should our response be when the going gets tough and the road is difficult?

We shouldn't be surprised by this clash of cultures – it's the reaction to the life of heaven being lived on an earth that is still under the grip and tyranny of the powers of evil. Jesus, through his death, has made for us the way of escape, the way to be rescued from this hopeless state, and we who follow Jesus, are waiting in great anticipation for the final and complete fulfillment of God's work of salvation in a restored and renewed heaven and earth. That is the great climactic vision of the bible – A new heaven and a new earth – a restored world order in which the life of heaven and the life on earth is one!

Like the apostles, **we should obey God rather than men**, and we should live our lives, and encourage our fellow believers to live their lives, as those who are called to live the life of heaven while here on earth.

We should recognize our partnership in the mission of Jesus. Unlike the taxi firm that assures us of a safe risk-free journey, the way of following Jesus is not one primarily designed for our comfort and ease, but rather it is a **partnership in the mission of Jesus** to see God's kingdom come on earth, as this poem by Amy Carmichael pointedly shows:

No Scar?

Hast thou no scar'
No hidden scar on foot, or side, or hand'
I hear thee sung as mighty in the land,

I hear them hail thy bright ascendant star,
Hast thou no scar'

Hast thou no wound'
Yet I was wounded by the archers, spent,
Leaned Me against a tree to die; and rent
By ravening beasts that compassed Me, I swooned:
Hast thou no wound'

No wound, no scar'
Yet, as the Master shall the servant be,
And, pierced are the feet that follow Me;
But thine are whole: can he have followed far
Who has no wounds nor scar'

May God be with us and bless us and keep us, and use us as we travel this road together, even when the road gets rough, for his glory. AMEN.