



## MORRISON ZION EVANGELICAL LUTHERAN CHURCH

[www.mzluth.org](http://www.mzluth.org)

January 23, 2022

Pastor Randy Ott

3<sup>rd</sup> Sunday after Epiphany

First Lesson: [Nehemiah 8:1-3, 5-6, 8-10](#)

Psalm of the Day: Psalm 19

Second Lesson/Sermon Text: [Acts 4:23-31](#)

Gospel Lesson: [Luke 4:14-21](#)

### **Boldly Reveal Jesus Through The Word**

Welcome to worship today at Morrison Zion Lutheran Church. We exist to glorify God. We have set out to do this by gathering around the Gospel so that we may grow in the Gospel and go to others with this Gospel.

Grace, mercy and peace to you from God our Father, through Jesus. Amen.

In Christ, dear fellow redeemed:

It's been a while since I offered one of these. It's a workshop called ***Friendship Witnessing***. I've done it numerous times since I've been here, but it's been a while. One of the concepts that we always talk about in the workshop on ***Friendship Witnessing*** (learning how to share Jesus in your daily life with your friends) is this concept that one of the things God calls us to do is to pray dangerously. Pray dangerously—what does that mean?

Here's what it doesn't mean. It doesn't mean to pray with your eyes closed when you're driving to work. That's not what God means when He says to pray dangerously. That's not what He is encouraging you to do. Don't do that! That's a bad idea. Praying dangerously is if there is someone on your heart that you're worried about because of their relationship to Jesus, if there is someone that you're concerned about them spending eternity in heaven with you, then pray dangerously and say "Lord, use me. Open my eyes to see the opportunities to talk about Jesus, to share Jesus." Instead of just praying "Lord, have someone else somewhere, somehow, some way tell them about Jesus. But whatever you do Lord, don't involve me." We'd never say that, but sometimes that's kind of what we think, isn't it? Instead it's being intentional in saying "Lord, use me."

Isn't that exactly what we see the members of the early church in [Acts 4](#) doing in what I read to you today? It's a beautiful prayer. It's a beautiful prayer that these guys, who all ran away when Jesus got arrested, and the group that is with them now (a little while after Pentecost), their numbers are growing, they get together and they take and weave

Scripture into their prayer. They quote [Psalm 2](#) and apply it perfectly to what happened to Jesus and the situation they are in. It's kind of interesting how the Spirit has worked in their hearts and you can see the Spirit living in their hearts as they prayed this dangerous prayer and said "God, pour out your Spirit and power on us so that we boldly tell others about Jesus."

Why were they asking this? Beyond their desire to have people in heaven, why was there a special need for boldness right now? It was mentioned in what I read to you in one little word. They talked about the "threats" that the leaders of the Jews had spoken against Peter and the others that had just been released from jail that morning. Here is how they got there. They had been going into the temple through one of the gates. By one of the gates there was a man who was born who, from his birth on (he was in his 40's now) was crippled. He had been crippled for 41 years I think it said. He was there at that gate every day. He was begging because that's how he was provided for physically. People would give something to him. So as Peter and others were walking into the temple courtyards, the guy got their attention. Peter said to him, "Look at me." So the guy looked at him and he said "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I do have, I give to you. In the name of Jesus of Nazareth, get up and walk." The guy got up and walked. News of this spread like wildfire because this guy had been there for decades and now all of a sudden he is walking around. The people knew why he was walking around. People had heard and had seen what had happened—how Peter healed him in the name of Jesus. Jesus still would have been abuzz two months later in Jerusalem (or however long it was).

The news spread like wildflower. The crowd gathers. And Peter uses this gathering of a crowd as an opportunity to talk about Jesus; to proclaim Law and Gospel; to talk about how Jesus had been put to death and to say that He rose from the dead and He is the Savior of the world. He proclaims all of these things. Then the leaders and the temple guards and some others come and arrest Peter and the others for talking about Jesus and throw them into prison.

They wanted to do more than what they did but it says they were afraid of the people, so they couldn't do anything like put them to death, like they might have wanted to do. They couldn't do anything more. The next morning, they gathered together and warned them very strongly (which is probably where the word "threats" comes from) not to talk about Jesus' resurrection, not to make them guilty of Jesus' death, and to quit talking about all these things. Peter says "We can't help but speak about what we have seen and heard."

Now they come back to this gathering spot in Jerusalem. Other believers are there. They tell them about everything that had happened; the healing, the threats, the violence, all this stuff and the immediate response that we are told of is to pray. It was to pray to the One who created the world because the One who created the world has

all this power. "God, this is who you are. You are the all-powerful God. You can do anything." What [Psalm 2](#) talked about, "The kings of the nations rise up against the LORD and against His anointed one. It happened to Jesus and now, Lord, it's happening to us. Lord, pour out your Spirit on us so that we boldly go and proclaim this, boldly go and keep on speaking about Jesus, boldly do what Jesus has called us to do; to be His witnesses." They take it to God in prayer and they say "Pour out your Spirit on us so that we can keep doing" what I'm guessing their sinful nature was telling them "don't be doing that! That's going to get you thrown into prison. The food is not really good there. You don't want to go back there! Don't talk about Jesus. This isn't what you should be doing." Their own sinful nature and the devil have all kinds of reasons to shut up. God's love in Christ is the reason to keep talking, so they know they need the Spirit's power so they can continue to speak God's Word to these people; to reveal Jesus as the Savior of the world, the One who would proclaim liberty to the captives, the One who gave sight to the blind, the One who set the prisoners free, and all the other things that we heard in our Gospel today. To do it boldly—I suppose boldly meant to keep doing it and not hide even though there were these threats against them.

I find the courage and the faithfulness of these early Christians to be amazing because their track record in this area wasn't all that great. Maundy Thursday, they ran away when the crowd came, when Jesus was arrested. One of them ran away so quick that he ran out of his clothes. He ran away naked. He just wanted to get out of there. He didn't want to have anything to do with guys with swords. But now they turn to God and say "Lord, help, because this work is too important to let slide." I'm fascinated by it because I have never been threatened with physical violence if I keep talking about Jesus. I'm guessing you probably never have either. I don't think that we're real worried about if we talk to someone today and we talk about Jesus that it's going to get us thrown into jail.

I wonder what I would do if I had to face that. Have you ever thought about that? Would I have the strength of faith to keep saying this is the most important thing in the world? Or would I find excuses and reasons to change the topic? "It sure is cold out there today." That's easy. We can do that. Everyone will jump on board. But I think the answer is where they were, going to God in prayer and saying "Lord, our strength isn't enough. We need your strength because this work is too important to let slide."

You and I don't face those kinds of challenges of threats of violence or harm or physical harm or imprisonment, but there are Christians around the world that do. In the back on the radiators on the inside by the middle doors, on each side there is a track rack holder and a [little pamphlet](#) that is from 316NOW. It is encouraging 15 days of prayer from February 1<sup>st</sup> and on. That's for the Christians that are in Asia because that's when they celebrate their major festivals, their New Year and all these things. There right now there are a lot more challenges to sharing Jesus. There are a lot more threats. It has come up again now that if they find them learning from someone, even online, about

Christianity, they could face imprisonment. There are people that face that around the world. So that track in the back, it's mentioned in the Announcement sheet. Pick it up. It has suggested things to pray about for 15 days to pray for these people that are facing threats like this.

The threats you and I face are more of the ones that come from inside of us. We are worried that someone might think of us at times like we're a nut job if we talk about Jesus. We are worried that people will think we're a religious fanatic or some kind of weirdo. People think that about Christians at times, right? Sometimes I think they think that because Christians act that way. Understand clearly what it means to pray boldly. It doesn't mean to be rude, obnoxious and getting in someone's face and yell at them about Jesus. That's not boldness. That's foolishness. That's not what God has called us to do, so sometimes people's caricatures of Christianity are probably earned by some Christians.

Today around the country it's **Right to Life Day** and prayers for the unborn and things like that. I certainly want to see babies delivered, but at times have Christians gone a little far in how they have witnessed and how they have yelled and how they have attacked, in the name of Jesus attacked and tried to blow up abortion clinics and say they are serving God? That's not boldness. That's wrong. But because someone else has screwed up, or maybe even you have screwed up sometime in your life in talking about Jesus and your boldness wasn't the way God intended, that doesn't mean you can't do it now.

God has called us to be bold. That means to put ourselves on the line, to talk about Jesus because the only way that He is going to be revealed is through this message of the Gospel, and God's plan for revealing it is through fallible, sinful creatures like you and me; people that will come up with excuses and won't do what God has called us to do and do it repeatedly. Yet our God still comes to us and says "Here is my body. Here is my blood. You are forgiven for failing me. I love you and my love for you is unending." That same love that He has for us is the love that He has for the entire world. So forgiven and renewed by our God, we say "Lord, help me to be bold. Help me to talk about Jesus. But Lord, help me to do it in love, in your love, in concern for people's souls; to show what God has demanded of us; to show how we fall short, and then to lead people to say 'our only hope is in Jesus,' not in ourselves." That's the boldness that God wants for us.

Today, the first prayer that we had in church this morning, did you notice yourself in it or did you just think "This is the prayer where pretty soon I get to sit down," and that's all the farther you got in thinking about the prayer? It's the **Prayer of the Day**. It's at the start of the service. Look at it again. It talks about pouring out God's Spirit on us so that we can proclaim freedom to the prisoners, sight for the blind and do all the things that Jesus said applied to Him so that we continue to do it today. That's what we ask

God to do. It's a bold prayer. Make it your bold prayer. Make it your bold prayer in your daily life. This isn't a HAVE TO, you HAVE TO do this. This is, as Christians, "I know I'm going to heaven. I want others to be there with me. I know God loves these people, so I want to love them, even the ones I don't necessarily like. I want to love them and share Jesus with them."

God is the God who answers prayers. Sometimes you'll boldly proclaim God's Word to someone, and they will ignore you. They won't listen to you. That will happen. I doubt they'll throw you into prison. I'm pretty sure they won't nail you to a cross. That's what happened in the early church and that's what happened to Jesus. So while we have the time where we aren't facing those threats, now is the time to boldly reveal Jesus to a world that is so full of hurts. Amen.

**And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. ([Philippians 4:7](#).) Amen.**