

## **O LORD, GIVE ME THE WORDS**

The Rev. Mark D. Wilkinson, Rector  
St. Aidan's Episcopal Church  
Virginia Beach VA  
[www.aidanvbva.net](http://www.aidanvbva.net)

In pondering our passage from Acts I found myself asking an “I wonder” question. We use I wonder questions in Godly Play to engage the children in making the passage their own. This is an excellent practice for adults so listen again to the passage and then I will ask you all the “I wonder” question that occurred to me.

As with last week we need to imagine ourselves in the situation. Peter has been arrested for “talking to the people.” Arrested by whom? The Sanhedron, the same group of people who just 60 or so days ago had arrested, tried and convicted Jesus and sent him to Pilate. The Romans crucified Jesus, but they did this with the help of the Jewish leadership. Now it is Peter who is being questioned about the healing that “he” performed. The leaders are truly curious and also more than a little concerned. I imagine they thought that killing Jesus would end the issue. Kill the shepherd and the flock will scatter. Yet just the other day 5000 were baptized.

The “rebellion” if you will is in fact growing, not going away. The leaders are responsible to the Romans to help keep the peace and this group who follow Jesus is threatening the Pax Romana.

Acts 4:5-12

The day after they had arrested Peter and John for teaching about Jesus and the resurrection, the rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. When they had made the prisoners stand in their midst, they inquired, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. This Jesus is `the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, it has become the cornerstone.'

There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

I wonder what Paul was thinking just before he began to speak. This is not a rhetorical question my friends, I expect some answers from you. (Pause for responses from congregation.)

What started me on this path was thinking about the prayer I always use to begin my homily. The commentaries all refer to today's passage as Peter's third sermon following Pentecost. I must admit that Friday, driving home I muttered O Lord give me the words. In the week spent with doctors, therapists and things medical, not much had been written. Yet Peter certainly didn't have much time to prepare his sermon to the Sanhedron.

Now stop and consider that this is Peter, who deserted Jesus in the garden, in the courtyard, at the cross, depending on which gospel you read and goes back to fishing. Somehow, somehow, he all of sudden seems to get it! The answer is that he is filled with the spirit.

There is a prophetic power in Peter's speech as there will be in Stephen's speech that will soon follow. This prophetic nature is a characteristic of Luke. It harkens back to Moses and the others who were initially rejected by the people and most certainly by the leaders. The prophets often used the image of the shepherd in their statements and we find our Acts passage paired with the Good Shepherd passage from John this week. One element that we need to examine from this for it informs our Acts passage. The good shepherd can also be translated the model shepherd. Jesus is the model for us and for our leaders to follow. Now the Sanhedron thought they were good shepherds doing what was right for the people, but their focus was on earthly power. Israel was chosen to show God to the world and they are not doing this. Peter is calling them to account in this passage. He changes psalm 118:22 The stone that the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. Peter states "This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, it has become the cornerstone." Peter completely turns the tables on them.

So what does this have to do with us? How many of us hesitate to speak out about our faith because we do not think we know enough. We cringe from those who seem to have all the answers and say, well I can't argue with them, they know their bible and I don't. While not in the portion of the passage we read today the next verse states that Peter was an uneducated and common. He was after all a fisherman. He might have been middle class if such a thing existed, but he was certainly not among the elite of Jerusalem. I love Peter because I can identify with Peter.

The amazing thing for me in all of this is that God uses Peter in incredible ways. This run of the mill fisherman who deserts Jesus at critical junctures rises up to be one of the leaders. Now he suddenly didn't become a biblical scholar. However after Pentecost he opens up to the Spirit and allows the Spirit to put the words in his mouth. I wonder if you asked Peter to repeat the speech if he would have been able to. When speaking the word of the Spirit, when speaking from your heart, written texts usually go out the window and one often does not remember exactly what was said. I cannot recreate some of my best sermons, in fact most of what I put on the web is just the approximation of what I planned to say. The best are when I get out of the way and trust the Spirit will give me the words that you the congregation need to hear. What is even more fun is when someone comes out the door and says, that point you made about, really spoke to me. I think hmm, I don't believe I said that. Then I know that the Spirit is really working, because the person that said that heard

exactly what they needed to hear. Whether I actually said it or not is irrelevant. The person heard what the Spirit knew they needed to hear.

This is not a special gift. All of you can do this. When someone comes up and asks you one of those questions, like, why do you even bother going to church, stop and say "OK God, give me the words that this person needs to hear." And then start talking. You may be amazed at what comes out of your mouth if you are truly open. Let me give you a personal illustration.

Long before I considered ordination, I was attending a small group that met once a week for bible study and prayer. We often ended the evening with time for healing prayer. One night one of the women came up to me and said, "I want you to pray for my wrist." My first reaction was to say, "well you really want Wendy, she is the healer in our family." She looked me in the eye and said, "No, you are the one who is supposed to pray for me." So I took her wrist between my two hands and said to God, "Ok God, I have no clue what to do or what to say so you better come through and quick." Now I have no recollection of what I said. However, I felt this incredible heat between my hands and then a pop. She looked at me and said, "Thanks that's much better." I of course picked up the phone the next day and called my associate rector who ran the healing ministry and asked, "What the heck just happened?" I, like Peter at that point, was uneducated, I was just your average pew dweller. Yet by being open to the Spirit I was launched into a new world of ministry. Anybody can do this, just be open to the Spirit.

Oh God give me the words. Oh God give all of us the words.