“Speak Up!” Memory verse: Mark 13:11

April 28th, 2024 Scripture Reading: Acts 4:1-12

**SLIDE 1: Title**

Today we are picking up from where we left off last week. We discussed the powerful reality that the Holy Sprit is in fact the Spirit of adoption and as such, you and I and all who believe, are full-fledged children of God. We can call God Almighty, “Abba, Father Daddy.”

Today I would like to ask you to think about a question…It’s not a very profound question, it’s simply a question of experience…Have you ever lost your voice? It typically happens as the side effect of some viral infection. We call it laryngitis because it is an inflammation of the larynx or voice box. When our vocal cords become irritated and swell then they can no longer move in a normal way and we are rendered voiceless. I know a few folks here at church had such symptoms this past winter season. Losing one’s voice makes for more than an irritated throat; it means an irritating life. We have to resort to other means of communication. Hand signals, maybe some scribbled notes, I would assume we use our eyebrows much more when we cannot speak. It is frustrating to lose your voice.

We can lose our voice from illness, but we can also give up our voice.

**SLIDE 2: While we can lose our voice, sometimes we choose to give it up.**

In conversations with neighbors or family members, we might choose to shy away from certain topics. The classics, as we have mentioned before, are religion and politics. When these come up, we shut down. It’s easier to keep the peace and talk about something else. It’s safer to stay away from hot buttons. Nobody wants an argument….

But, we are Holy Spiritans! We have the Holy Spirit who is God dwelling within us, the Spirit of adoption claiming us as his own. The Spirit endows us with supernatural gifts, meaning abilities that are beyond us, over and above what we are capable of on our own. And one of the things the Holy Spirit provides for us is a voice.

In Mark chapter 13 we come across a very difficult passage. In it, Jesus makes reference to the end of the world, when Christ himself will return “in the clouds with great power and splendor” at which time he will gather all those who follow him. That sounds like a wonderful climax to the story of history, to be gathered up by Jesus into heaven is the greatest thing we could hope for. But this good news is preceded by what the bible refers to as “labor pains”. Meaning, before things get better, they are going to get worse. These pains include natural disasters, famines and earthquakes, wars and rumors of wars. False teachers will rise up and convince people to follow them. Stars will fall and the sun will become dark. But it’s even more than that, Jesus says that these labor pains are going to get personal. He says to his disciples in verse 9, READ Mark 13: 9-13

**SLIDE 3&4: Mark 13: 9-13**

It’s possible that, at this point, the disciples are thinking the same thing we are…”Whoa, whoa, wait a minute…What is going on here? Executions and betrayals and being hated? Is this what we signed up for? Shouldn’t there be a little more victory and triumph involved? Shouldn’t there be less of the suffering stuff? Shouldn’t following Jesus fix things and make our lives easier?”

**SLIDE 5: Shouldn’t following Jesus fix things and make our lives easier?”**

Some preachers will tell you yes and at that point, they will have exposed themselves as a false teacher. Look at what Jesus says, “Everyone will hate you because of my name.”

**SLIDE 6: “Everyone will hate you because of my name.”**

Is there some other way to interpret that? No, we follow Jesus because he is the Truth, not so we can gain popularity. We follow Jesus because he is the Way, not so we can remain comfortable. We follow Jesus because to whom else can we go? Who else has the words of eternal life? Who else holds the keys of hell and death? Who else would bother to save poor, wretched sinners? No one, no one else but Jesus. So we follow him and he takes us to a cross. And at the cross we put to death the desires of our flesh, our drive for popularity, our love of comfort it is all nailed to his cross and at the cross, we are filled with the very presence of God; the Holy Spirit. And as we move past the cross, we move on with a target on our backs. Again, Jesus warns his disciples, ‘Watch out! You may be beaten, you may stand trial, you may be turned in,” but here is the promise, here is the thing to cling to in the midst of the labor pains, verse 11; “When they haul you in and hand you over, don’t worry ahead of time about what to answer or say. Instead, say whatever is given to you at that moment, for you aren’t doing the speaking but the Holy Sprit is.” The Holy Spirit provides us Holy Spritians with a voice, a supernatural voice!

Now it is true, our context is not the same as that of the disciples. They lived under a much different governmental structure then we do. Likely none of us will stand trail for our faith in Jesus at least not in any official court of law…but what about in the court of popular opinion? What about the court of the workplace? What about the court of other people’s perception of me? We stand trial in these courts each and every day….what is our testimony? Do we have a voice? Can we trust the Spirit to speak through us even in these courts that take the form of conversations or online posts or some other form of communication.

Let me say clearly, the Holy Spirit is not the spirit of argument, or the spirit of shouting loudly, or the spirit of bulldozing. He is not the spirit of condescension. He is also not the spirit of silence or the spirit of withdrawal. He is the Spirit of speaking up. He gives us a voice when we would rather shy away. 2 Timothy 1:7 reminds us that God did not give us a sprit that is timid…some translation will say a spirit of fear, the Greek word is cowardice…God did not give us a spirit if cowardice, but one of power, love and self-control. Cowardice is easier and safer…running away from the battle line will probably keep us out of harm’s way, but again, Jesus does not promise us a life that is easy and conflict free…but he does promise us a voice.

**SLIDE 7: Jesus does not promise us a life that is easy and conflict free…but he does promise us a voice.**

Not too long after Jesus speaks this promise to his disciples, it is put to the test. Jesus ascends into heaven and the apostles do what they can to try to stick to Jesus’ teachings. They are enabled to perform miracles as well and sure enough, it lands them into trouble. In Acts chapter 4 Peter and John are arrested for healing a crippled man at the temple. And how did they heal? In the name of Jesus. They are promptly arrested and issued a gag order: “stop speaking and teaching in the name of Jesus.” In other words, your voice should no longer be heard. Keep your beliefs to yourself. Keep your religious views quiet. Don’t speak about Jesus. That is the message of the Jewish leaders, and that is the message of our culture today.

But Peter and John are filled with the Holy Spirit. A Spirit of power who gives us our voice. They reply to the authorities, “We can’t stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.” This verse is reminiscent of the prophet Jeremiah, who said, “The Word of God burns in my heart, like a fire in my bones. I try to hold it in, but I cannot.” By the power of the Holy Spirit, we cannot just keep to ourselves this gospel that we know and believe, this truth that saves us. It is meant to be spoken!

Ater Peter and John are released, they head back to the rest of the believers, they tell everyone what happened, and they immediately turn to prayer. They hand the situation over into God’s hands. And in this prayer, these believers proclaim that God is the one truly in control and at the same time they must also confess that it’s getting a little dangerous out there. Things do not seem to be getting easier. In verse 29 they pray, “Now Lord, take note of their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with complete confidence. Stretch out your hand to bring healing and enable signs and wonders to be performed through the name of Jesus.”

**SLIDE 8: “Now Lord, take note of their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with complete confidence. Stretch out your hand to bring healing and enable signs and wonders to be performed through the name of Jesus.”**

The same name about which they have been told to shut up. So in the face of threat, these apostles double down. Notice they do not ask God for a smooth ride or even for protection from the authorities. They ask for the supernatural ability to speak with “complete confidence.” And that word, “confidence” indicates boldness and a freedom of speech. By the power of the Holy Spirit we are given freedom to speak. We don’t feel the weight of that very much in our context. In this country, the government has already afforded us a freedom of speech. We cannot be legally remanded for something we say, at least in theory. But, how often do we censor ourselves? How often are the social pressures of the situation enough to keep us quiet? How often do we suffer from a self-imposed laryngitis where we just don’t have a voice?

But what would we even say? That is the justification we give. When buzzwords and hot topics come into the conversation, we can very easily be at a loss for words. We feel like we don’t know enough about the topic. We don’t want to appear foolish. And besides, everyone has their own opinion about everything anyway…who am I to try and change someone else?

It’s a good question. Who am I to try to change someone else?…I am no one…I cannot change another person. In my own ability, I do not have the best arguments lined up, I do not have the most convincing proofs. I am no one, but I am a Holy Spiritan. And as a Holy Spiritian I can be a mouthpiece and a voice box for the God who lives in me. I can let that fire in my bones out and allow the Holy Spirit to speak through me. The apostles were not highly educated. They were not respected orators who were known for their well-constructed ideas of their eloquence. Look again at their response to the Jewish leaders… “We can’t stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”

**SLIDE 9: “We can’t stop speaking about what we have seen and heard.”**

We know Jesus rose from the dead, we know he is the Way, the Truth and the Life. We know that everyone we know needs to know this gospel. And that is what we speak about with all boldness and freedom. If they were to have any degrees behind their name, it would not have mattered. It was all about what they had seen and heard.

Now, this is not to say we don’t have work to do. We need to keep our noses in our bibles. We need to keep our heads bowed in prayer. This supernatural voice of the Spirit is a gift born out of our relationship with God. It’s much like any other ability, we will get better at it with practice, with continued use and by living in communion with the Spirit each and every day. We don’t expect him to show up only when we need him in the midst of a conversation to give us the words to say and then be off again. No, remember he dwells within us…this is to be a permanent and growing relationship.

So we need to attend to our relationship with God, but we would also do well to read up on the topics and issues that our foremost in our culture. We ought to be in the process of learning as much as we can about the issues that divide people. On the back of your notes, I have included a very basic list of some books to check out that will help you to be better versed on important cultural issues.

**SLIDE 10: Read up on important cultural issues**

Things like apologetics, which helps to provide a defense of our faith. To the more tense issues like human sexuality, abortion and marriage.

**SLIDE 11: Video**

These are not topics to shy away from, because God has something to say about them, and we have been given the voice to speak up! We can let people know about the value of life and the true nature of marriage and above all, about how to enter into a saving relationship with Jesus Christ.

I want to close with a quote from a well known atheist. His name is Penn Jillette, the very famous magician of the duo Penn and Teller. But Mr. Jillette has also been very outspoken about his belief that there is no God. He says he believes very much in love and family, but it is the supernatural aspect of God that he cannot believe in. To his credit however, Penn seems to demonstrate a sense of goodwill toward those who disagree with him and he has landed on a very important truth when he says, “If you believe that there is a heaven and hell…and you think ‘Well, it’s not really worth telling them this because it would make it socially awkward’…How much do you have to hate somebody to believe that everlasting life is possible and not tell them that? If I believed beyond the shadow of a doubt that a truck was coming to hit you and you didn’t believe it…there’s a certain point where I tackle you. And this is more important than that.”

So I ask you…is he right? Does our unwillingness to speak about what we have seen and heard, what we know about Christ, mean that we hate people? Maybe we could phrase Penn’s question in the opposite way, “How much do you have to love someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and to tell them that?”

**SLIDE 12: “How much do you have to love someone to believe that everlasting life is possible and to tell them that?”**

To speak up is to love. To lay awkwardness on the line is to love. To overcome our self-imposed laryngitis is to love. I would say it is our job to open our mouths to boldly speak and we can leave the tackling part to the Holy Spirit.

Amen.