



## Morrison Zion Evangelical Lutheran Church

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11<sup>th</sup> Sunday after Pentecost

Acts 4

Pastor John Hildebrandt

### **The Work in India**

When the WELS team in India sends reports back to Milwaukee about what is going on in India and to our supervisors and advisors who help us and pray for us and watch over us, the response we get often is “That sounds just like the Book of Acts! That sounds just like the Book of Acts. It sounds like the same challenges that we read about in Scripture and the same outpouring of blessing that we see in the pages of Scripture.” It really is an amazing privilege for me to be your representative in India because what God is doing there is just like the pages of Acts.

Yes the challenges are great, but the blessings are even greater. God is more powerful than anyone who stands in the way of the gospel. That is exactly what Peter and John confessed here in our text for today. They said, “*we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard*” (Acts 4:20).

What was it that Peter and John had seen and heard? Just think about that for a moment. Peter and John were two of the inner three of Jesus’ disciples. They saw everything that the other nine saw, but they saw some things that the other disciples didn’t see. They went with Jesus into the room where he raised Jairus’ daughter. They were with Jesus at Gethsemane closer than the others. They were on the Mount of Transfiguration and they saw his glory. So many things that these disciples saw—they saw Jesus change water into wine, heal the sick, preach to thousands proclaiming who he was—the Son of God—that he was setting his sights on Jerusalem to go there to suffer and die. They saw him arrested. They saw him on trial, condemned to death, executed, taken off that cross, dead, put into a tomb. They saw him after rising from the dead. They saw that empty tomb. They spoke to Jesus. They ate with him after he rose from the dead. And they saw him ascending into heaven giving them that command and promise that they were to go into all the world and share the message of the gospel with all nations and that he was going to be with them always, even to the end of the age. Peter and John had seen so much and they couldn’t help but speak about what they had seen and heard.

Just think of someone who wins the lottery or gets an A on his report card or has some great news. Maybe there is a birth in the family, or a wedding announcement, or something you just have to tell people. You just have to tell the good news to your friends and your family. That’s the type of reaction that Peter and John had. The message of the gospel that they had seen and heard they couldn’t keep inside. There was no way they could shut their lips or that they could stop speaking about what they knew. See the gospel is powerful that way.

The gospel has that same effect on Christians today. In fact, it has the same effect on Christians whether they are in Northeast Wisconsin or they are in India. I didn't have to twist Pastor Ott's arm and say, "Come on! You are supposed to have a Mission Festival and you are supposed to have me come and preach to you. Why aren't you having me come?" No, you gave the invitation to me. You wanted to hear about mission work. You want to hear about the gospel. That is why you came to church today, to hear about your Savior Jesus. Someone didn't have to twist your arm and say, "Well, I suppose we have to come to church today." No, the gospel motivated you to say, "I want to hear more about my Savior. I want to come and hear what Jesus has done for me and what he has done for my family, for my friends, for my acquaintances and for everyone around the world, including the people in India." The gospel has that powerful effect.

As the gospel works in our hearts, we can't help but do a number of things. We can't help but pray for our pastors, not only for those who are serving in far-off countries, but for your pastor right here. You can't help but pray for him. You don't just see him on Sunday and say, "Hi Pastor. How are you doing? Have a good week" and then go and forget about him for the rest of the week. You pray for him regularly because the gospel motivates you to do that—your concern for him, your concern for the spread of the gospel in your congregation.

Your concern for the gospel motivates you to consider again what your offerings are for the work of the Lord here, for the work of the Lord around the world, not just to think, "Well, I suppose I always give \$5 or I always give \$10, whatever my normal thing is." No, you think of what God has done for you—his death, his resurrection. He has given you not only every physical blessing that you enjoy and every physical blessing that I enjoy, but he has given us every spiritual blessing, so we can't help but think, "How can I even begin to pay this debt of love to him? How can I give even more of my time and my talents and my treasure to serve him, to serve his church, to serve his kingdom?" It even comes down to speaking. We can't help speaking about what we have seen and heard. The gospel is so powerful that it moves our lips and our tongues to speak to others what we know.

In India, I am not allowed to preach on Sunday, so you'll have to forgive me if my sermon isn't very good today because I am kind of rusty and out of practice. I only preach when I am in America. In India, I don't preach on Sundays and I don't baptize because I do not have a missionary visa. My official call says I am a missionary, but I don't have the right type of visa in India. A missionary visa only lasts for three months and there is no guarantee that it will be renewed. So every three months we would be in limbo wondering, "Can we continue? Can we stay?" So we decided we are not going to go that route. We are not going to come in as if we are the great foreigners who will do all the preaching and all the baptizing and have the nationals sit by the side and not take part in that ministry. Instead, we are there as helpers and advisors. We work as seminary trainers, seminary professors and advisors and helpers to the national workers. There are 103 national gospel workers, Indian men, who take the gospel to their countrymen in their own language, in their native language, instead of me, in my

faltering Telugu or Hindi trying to speak to them. They are fluent in their own language and can take that message to their countrymen.

We provide sermon books for them so that they have that message to share. But you see, they have this same confession as Peter and John. The national gospel workers that we work with say these same things. "We can't help but speaking about what we have seen and heard." They know that their countrymen, a nation of over one billion people is dying. They need the gospel. And they can't help but take that gospel to their countrymen even through hardships.

There are some villages where the Hindu religion, the elders who follow the Hindu religion will say, "We don't want your Christianity. Don't come and preach here. If you come and preach here, we will get a mob and beat you up." And they have done that. Gospel workers have been beaten for taking the gospel into a new village and yet, the next week they say, "I can't help it. I have to go. These people need to know the gospel. I am going to go in again." And they may get beaten up a second time and a third time. They don't say, "Well, I'm going to be in physical danger. I don't think I should go there." They say, "No. I can't help it. I have to tell people about their Savior."

Just this last year there was a congregation in the northern part of the country, one of our mission congregations, that was attacked in the middle of their Sunday worship service. A gang of young men came into the worship service and wanted to disrupt the people and have them run away in fear and started attacking the young people in that congregation. But, unexpectedly to the attackers, the Christian young men started to defend themselves and they swung back and fought back. It caused the people who were attacking to run away because they didn't expect that. They didn't expect Christians to defend themselves. But part of the assurance that the Indian Christians have is that Jesus has died and has risen for them and for their countrymen. They are not going to stop worshipping on Sunday because a mob may come. They are not going to stop worshipping because someone may attack them. They have to tell people. They have to worship their Savior because he has done so much for them.

We take things for granted a great deal in the United States. We take it for granted that we aren't going to have someone coming into the church here today and disrupting our worship service and saying, "We don't want you Christians worshipping here." We take it for granted all of the blessings that God has given to us. And yet, the gospel is more powerful than the apathy that might be trying to encroach its way into our hearts and into our minds. The gospel is so powerful that it gets us speaking about Jesus to others.

You and I are no different. Just because I have gone to a seminary doesn't make me any different or doesn't make me any more bold in speaking about Jesus. The same thing is true of our brothers in India. Some of the men in India have come from a Pentecostal background. Their idea of evangelism has been, "Let's put on a show. Let's come in with maybe a movie and show that to people. Or let's beat drums and march through the village and say 'Jesus, Jesus' and people will look at us and wonder what we are doing and maybe we will get some new members that way." The only thing is that this type of evangelism often backfires because either people are just looking for

some entertainment and not really looking to hear about their Savior, or they are offended by that type of cheering for our God as opposed to some other god.

So, in the seminary instruction, we have gone through very simple ways to tell others about Jesus. A simple Law and Gospel presentation like God's Great Exchange for example. Simply telling other people what we know. Telling people about our sinfulness, the demand of God, that he demands perfection and that we haven't lived up to that holiness that he expects of us, but Jesus came and lived a perfect life for us and died in our place to pay for our sins so that now we have his holiness, his righteousness and all our sins are put on him and taken away as far as the east is from the west. They are removed from us.

Really it is quite simple to do what God tells us to do in evangelism. When you think of what Scripture says, what Jesus himself tells us, he doesn't say, "You will be my advocates. You will be my lawyers. You will be my lobbyists who will use crafty language and convince people and twist their arms and get them to believe in me." He doesn't say that. He says, "You will be my witnesses."

What does a witness do? A witness says, "This is what I saw." A witness says, "This is what I heard." Does that sound familiar? That is exactly what Peter and John said here in our text—"*we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard*" (Acts 4:20). They couldn't help being witnesses. For every Christian, every single one of us, it's not that we should be a missionary. We are missionaries. Every single one of us is a witness. That doesn't mean that we have to wait until we get some special training. It doesn't mean we have to go through the seminary. It doesn't mean we have to do something special. We simply tell what we already know, what we have already seen and heard. Through the eyes of faith, each one of you believers knows what Jesus has done for you. You are a prepared witness. You know what Jesus has done for you and you can tell others. Even the youngest Sunday school child here can say, "Jesus loves me and he loves you too." Even the youngest child is a witness.

Notice that Peter and John didn't say, "Well, I suppose we have to do this." They didn't say, "Well, Jesus gave us a command and we have to go and make disciples." They said, "We can't help it. We have to do it." That's the power of the gospel.

Just think of how the Canadian geese fly north and south whether its spring or fall. They don't say, "Well I suppose we have to fly all these distances." They just do it instinctively. Salmon don't say, "Well, I suppose I have to swim against the current and swim upstream to spawn." No, they instinctively do it. If creatures like that do things instinctively, we rational men and women and children who know the gospel and know what Jesus has done for us also can't help but say what we know and tell others.

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ, I often get told, "I could never go to India." That's fine. God has called me to go to India. He hasn't called you to go to India. I often get told, "It's so wonderful that you are going and taking the gospel to a place where I can't go." That's true, but I want to remind you today that you take the gospel to places where I can't go." When I'm in India on the other side of the world, I can't talk to your friends and neighbors and coworkers. I can't be where you are. God has placed you

here to be his missionary as well. Even your pastor doesn't know all the people that you know and that you speak to. You can't say, "Oh it's the pastor's job to do that." No, it's all of our jobs to take the gospel to others and to tell them what we know, what we have seen and heard. Because like our brothers and sisters in India, like Peter and John, we also confess "we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard."