**People of Courage Peter and John Before the Sanhedrin**

There’s a great saying, I think it’s an Icelandic quote. That says ‘the glory is never found in the falling, but every time we rise again after each fall.

I believe this sermon is the last in the series of five opportunities to hear about the power of courage in the lives of our biblical ancestors.

Today I will be preaching about Peter and John, John the absolute beloved disciple of Jesus and Peter, who, despite all his toing, and froing became the rock, that he built his church upon.

The back story of this really begins at Pentecost when the spirit of God poured out his blessing upon the disciples and everything began to change. We are particularly told of a story where Peter and John encounter a man who was born lame and was begging for money. The normal response here as often happens with us perhaps if we take a walk around Milton Keynes and see people begging on the streets is to buy them some food or in some cases, perhaps give them some money. It’s not usually in the plan to bend down, take their hand and heal them in the name of Jesus Christ. But that is exactly what Peter did, instructing him to get up and walk. So, you can imagine the spectacle of this man, clinging to Peter and John following them as they walked leaping and praising God, and it caused a bit of a stir and a large crowd gathered.

So Peter did the only thing he knew best, and that was to preach the gospel! Now that should be where our story ends because it’s a great story isn’t it, but that’s where it kind of begins because right in the middle of all that wonder and joy, along comes a party of temple guards and arrests them. Bit of a downer, but a pattern that we’ve seen before. Here, just like as recorded in Jesus’s life, we have yet another instant of deep conflict between Jesus’s witnesses and local authorities.

You know briefly, there was a moment where Jesus’ kingdom appeared to be appealing, but it wasn’t long before Israel’s leaders decided they wanted to have nothing to do with Jesus or with His kind of kingdom. But that’s okay, because they resolved that, they put him to death, and they probably thought yep that’s it, literally washing their hands of this nonsense. But that wasn’t it, was it? It was too late; the message was out. So now they had a whole load of other issues to deal with, not just one, Jesus Christ, but multiple people sharing the good news of his kingdom.

In those days after Peter and John were arrested and sent to prison for the night, their trial would’ve been the next day, during which they would’ve been brought before the Sanhedrin, the highest Jewish civil and religious court in the land. These people were all about control, preaching and teaching was regarded as the right possessed only by themselves or whom they approved. But Peter and John, were just off doing their own thing teaching about the one true Messiah, but unfortunately it was on the turf of the officials, and they weren’t best pleased about that! The teachings and miracles of Jesus were naturally welcomed by the masses because they were stories of promise and hope, so you can see why the authorities of the day were getting concerned about the loss of power that they had over the people.

At the point of arrest, it would’ve been a good time for Peter and John to shut up and go on their way, but just like their Lord before, they didn’t. Instead, they both decided to challenge them and fight for what they believed in.

 The response of Peter and John to this trial was most enlightening, in the first place, they were not intimidated as was expected.

Their courage and boldness were disarming to the Sanhedrin, who expected these men to cower or collapse under pressure. They were particularly impressed because it was not the education, status, or accreditation of these men which made them so bold, but their clear claim to the authority of Christ.

After being asked who’s authority do they have to behave in such a way in verse 29, it says Peter and the other apostles replied ‘We must obey God rather than human beings’, that was a pretty brave statement to make because not only does it take the wind out of the sails of the Jewish authorities at the time, but actually it’s blasphemous as well!

Those legally and morally responsible for the murder of Jesus were deeply concerned about his oft repeated claim from his followers that he rose from the dead and now has dominion over the whole world.

I think at this point, we begin to realise that the mission of these two are becoming less about just being present in the name of Christ, and more about finding the necessary courage to ensure God’s active presence continues to be alive and well.

Here we see a clear change in the behaviour of the disciples, we have seen them move from being afraid to suddenly, turning up the volume to declare the truth. We hear that Peter told a multitude of his fellow Jews, that they were guilty of killing god’s messiah, a Messiah that had risen from the dead. He courageously asserts the lordship of Jesus Christ, and the need for people to repent, and he and other disciples boldly baptise 3000 converts!

Just think about the danger, they were inviting into their lives with this kind of obedience!

But for the church to strive and thrive in those days, it needed the expositional and experiential knowledge and good news that Jesus Christ was in fact alive!

So, what does this teach us today?

I believe that courage in whatever form it comes involves having some kind of faith and a belief that means despite everything all will be well. Both in our personal as well as our church lives, we are another generation that like Peter and John still face challenge and like them we must be encouraged not to be afraid, but to face it.

Trial and struggle often bring people closer together, I think for Peter and John their work united them, giving them a sense of belonging and purpose.

Our trials can do the same, they may not be the same as the ones they faced, but like theirs, they still test our faith.

Today, at Stowe, we are gathered together, continuing to share a sense of belonging and purpose and even more so because today we remember and celebrate the gifting of the SMT Stowe church ministry team. A group of people who over the last 20 years who just like Peter and John came together to preach the good news of Christ!

When God calls us whoever we are, we will always be called upon to find courage, courage to make a decision as to if and how we respond.

And the fact that we’re all here today, in this church already tells me that you are a people of boldness and grace.

Sometimes the simplest step here as the American motivational speaker, Brené, Brown says, is that ‘courage starts with showing up and letting ourselves be seen.’ And once you’ve been seen, God will guide you into cultivating this little corner of his kingdom. Here again, you will need to find courage as you let the Lord take you, break you make you into the disciple, he needs you to be.

As we move into a new season here at Stowe, my prayer isn’t going to be that things change, but more so that prayer changes you so that you change things.

This was the gifting that he gave to Peter and John all those years back, he still gives it to you today. My continued prayer for you is that you will not be afraid of what is to come, but instead find a profound and godly courage to open yourselves to feel the rewilding of the Holy Spirit. Amen