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Some of you may be beginning to wonder, how long I plan to keep going through Acts, which is an excellent question. The answer is, I am not exactly sure myself, whereas with other sermon series I have done, there was a definitive start and end point. With Samuel, it began when he was born and ended with his death, with Moses, it ended with the liberation of Israel from Egypt. But Acts is a different kind of narrative. Instead of culminating in a crashing climax, it begins with the loud and violent wind of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit coming upon the Church. But then it just goes on, while there are certainly miraculous moments, mostly Acts just continues on in an ordinary way. Aside from a few passages covering Pentecost and the conversion of Paul, some may even call it boring. In the book of Acts, we find times that are ordinary, we find people who are so ordinary, but in all of them we continue to find the movement of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit which still moves among us, ordinary people, living in ordinary times. So to answer your hypothetical question, we are going to settle in for a while, listening not to the Acts of the Apostles, but to the acts of the Holy Spirit through ordinary men and women. We are going to continue to listen to what the Holy Spirit is saying as it illuminates this text and illuminates our lives, leading us ordinary men and women in discipleship.

When we left Peter and John two weeks ago, they were headed to the Temple for afternoon prayer, when they came upon a beggar who could not walk. After healing the man, through the name of Jesus Christ, they continued into the Temple, the man leaping for joy as he praised God. Soon after this miraculous healing, a crowd formed, amazed at what had happened, so Peter decided to do a little preaching. Which is where we continue this morning.

As Peter and John are doing some preaching the Sadducees came to them and we are told that they were very annoyed, because Peter and John were claiming that in Jesus there is the resurrection of the dead. Since it was already evening the Sadducees had them arrested, and held them until the next day when they would stand in front of the rulers, elders, scribes and the high priest. This is the first time that the apostles were thrown in jail but it certainly would not be the last. When they brought Peter and John out to stand in the midst of this group that has more power, that is certainly more educated than these simple fisherman, they decided it would be a good time to do a little more preaching about the resurrection of Jesus. Get used to this because it becomes a running theme, once they get into trouble for preaching, they decide the best way to dig themselves out is to do more preaching. I am no lawyer but I don't think this legal strategy works for everything. This is incredible since the last time Peter and the high priest were together Peter was so afraid that he denied even knowing Jesus, but now he is boldly declaring the resurrection to the very high priest that turned Jesus over to the Romans, the very high priest that had made him too afraid to even acknowledge knowing Jesus. After being arrested for declaring the resurrection, Peter declares to the high priest who rejected Christ, that the resurrected Jesus is the cornerstone, He is our salvation.

Eventually those who are assembled realize as they are witnessing the boldness of Peter and John, that they are uneducated and ordinary men. They realize that they were companions of Jesus, part of that strange rabble of undesirables, outcasts and sinners. As much as we look back and marvel at the faith and devotion of the apostles, they always were ordinary. They remained as bumbling as ever, and they were not any better than the rest of us, even after Pentecost they could not hide that. Yet as ordinary as Peter and John are, their message is equally as profound, which is what amazes those who are witnessing this scene. This dirty pair who spent the night in

jail isn't amazing anyone, but they have a boldness, a message. The dichotomy between the message and those who proclaim it astounds them, and they have nothing to say in opposition, they are left speechless. This room full of people is left speechless by this ordinary pair, who carry an extraordinary message. They threaten them a few times, but eventually they are forced to let them go. And at the end of it, they return to this community of faith that is filled with the great grace of God, where all who are needy are taken care of. What could make them speak with such boldness to the high priest who had used the Romans to have Jesus killed? What could give Peter this change of heart? What made them so fearless? What can make us as fearless, and as bold as we are sent out with a message that some do not want to hear, what will take away our fear?

It is interesting here that the Sadducees are the ones who have Peter and John arrested. Unlike the Pharisees, the Sadducees do not believe in a resurrection at all. Instead they held to the older Jewish belief that death was the end of conscious life. Also unlike the Pharisees they are a group that inherits their power, they are aristocratic priests who are in charge of Temple practices which stood at the center of Jewish life, so they are part of the cultural elite. During the time of Jesus and the apostles, before the destruction of the Temple in 70 A.D., the Romans let them keep their positions of power so long as they used their social influence to keep things calm, to quiet rabble-rousers and condemn rebellion. This is a battle they would ultimately lose, with rebellion breaking out a few decades later, ending with the destruction of the Temple, which stripped them of all power and influence. But when we see them in Acts, they are still desperately trying to hold on to the power and influence that they have, maintaining control over their people. So when Peter and John are walking around speaking about the resurrection that does not bode well for those who have coped with a bad system. Talking about the resurrection,

is crazy talk, it threatens the whole social order. The social order that the Romans have worked so hard to create, a social order based on fear, fear of death, fear of death on a cross. If death is not at the end, if there is a resurrection, the whole structure starts to crumble, people no longer have to be afraid, you can no longer control people through fear of death.

That is the secret of the Church that no one in power has ever seemed to figure out. That is why so many ordinary people are emboldened to stand against fear and oppression, against towering giants of authority and boldly declare that they were not afraid. Only by this message of the resurrection, which drives away our fear, no matter how ordinary we believe ourselves to be. It is this Easter hope which continues to give us boldness, continues to make apostles out of ordinary men and women. When the Church was being persecuted, often severely, it just kept continuing to grow in spite of being outlawed, in spite of martyrdom. Without the power of death, there is no reason to be afraid, without the fear of death, there is no control. And that is exactly what the resurrection does for us, when we are baptized we are buried with Jesus, and we rise to new life in the sure hope of the resurrection. When we are baptized into Jesus' death, we have already gotten the dying over with, and you cannot scare dead people, no matter how hard you try.

This is what gives the ordinary Peter and John this boldness that amazes those gathered in this room. This is why Peter does not cower in fear when he sees the high priest, but instead boldly declares the resurrection in Christ. He has already been to Easter, he knows he already has eternal life with Christ. By the power of the Holy Spirit, which fills the mouths of ordinary men and women with the incredible message of the resurrection, Peter knows that he has nothing left to fear. It is this Easter faith, strengthened by our Pentecost encounter with the Holy Spirit, which buries our fears with the strength of God's love. It is this boldness of ordinary men and

women that created the community of faith that we see at the conclusion of the chapter. A community that is exciting and dynamic, a community that is of one heart and soul. A community that is filled with the Holy Spirit that has never left us, and continues to remind us that we have nothing to fear. It is not a community that is meant to stand in contrast to our own but remind us of that we live in a different kind of community. A community where even the most ordinary person speaks a message of incredible power. A community that is not based on fear, but declares the resurrection that has been accomplished through God's incredible love for us. A community in which all of our needs can be met through the great grace that has been poured out upon us.