

No Other Name©**Acts 4:1-22****June 10, 2012****Dr. Sharlyn Gates**

Today is a day we look forward to at Holly Presbyterian Church. After worship, the Christian Education Committee has planned a fun picnic with hot dogs grilled outside. We hope everyone will stay for the fun, food and fellowship. Our main purpose, here at the beginning of the summer break for Sunday School, is to recognize and honor all those who have contributed to the Christian Education effort in this past year. Our program has been creative, fun, and one that has given opportunity for much growth as disciples of Jesus.

But in this service, the Outreach Committee and I thought this would be a good time to also recognize others who have given much of themselves as well.

Since we are especially focusing on Christian Ed today, I'd like to ask all who have helped in anyway – Bible Study, Special Studies (like Lent), Maundy Thursday, Sunday School for adults, youth or children, Teens for Christ or Confirmation – everyone who did anything like teaching or helping with crafts or the nursery, or preparing snacks please stand up and remain standing.

All who have ever helped this past year with:

- Lay leading
- Greeters/ushers
- Music (piano, choir, special music)
- Sound
- Decorating
- Preparing the sanctuary
- Taking care of the building or grounds (work days, cleaning up, painting, tearing out, flower beds, etc)
- Working on funeral dinners
- Elders who serve on Session
- Served on a committee
- Helped in the office
- Helped with the fall retreat
- Garage sale
- Baby Pantry
- Preached a sermon
- Participated in worship

Since we are all standing up, take a moment to turn to someone next to you and tell them, "thank you for serving the church in the name of Jesus Christ."

You may be seated.

Isn't it exciting to hear about the very early days of the church – that time when Jesus had risen and ascended into heaven; when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and they preached with such power about Jesus that thousands of people became believers? A spark was lit and the church began to grow. And we are still a part of that legacy, still working today to help spread the good news of salvation in Jesus' name.

When we read about Peter and John – those early disciples who were uneducated and considered powerless in the culture they lived in – and how they were suddenly empowered with the Spirit to heal and to preach and how they stood up to those rulers of Israel, telling them to repent and to believe – I have to say it makes me stop and think about our witness today.

While we obviously have much desire to keep the church alive and to pass on the faith, while we have been willing to give our time, talents and treasure for the good of the church, I wonder if our witness has become somewhat diluted.

In a day and age when diversity and inclusiveness are important to many of us, I think we have backed away from speaking boldly about what we believe and who we believe in. We are afraid of offending someone. But I also wonder if, in all that concern for others, if we aren't becoming a little foggy about just what we do believe.

When we read about Jesus and what he went through for us, and when we hear about the early followers who were inspired by the power of the Holy Spirit who heard the Word of God – the story of Jesus, God's own Son who died and rose from the dead – when we hear about believers who were under great persecution because of their faith in Jesus as the Messiah, who did not hide away or shy away from speaking boldly about Christ – I for one feel that I sometimes dilute down the Word so I won't offend someone – and I am ashamed.

We are told that after this confrontation that Peter and John had with the rulers – after they were warned to not ever do anything speaking the name of Jesus again, that they went back to the other believers and they all lifted their voices in prayer. What were they praying for? You'd think they might be praying for protection, for safety, for a safe hiding place.

But no, they prayed for courage to speak boldly about their faith in Jesus!

Now, there is certainly something to be said for sharing our faith by the way we live and by our actions. In fact, my favorite quote of all time is from St. Francis. He said, "Preach Christ. And if all else fails, use words."

We do witness to others when we practice living the way Jesus taught. We show compassion to others; we extend hospitality to all – even when we are tired and not

particularly feeling like being hospitable; we are kind to strangers and yes, we are kind to one another. We don't back bite – being critical of others behind their backs – and we are caring and give the benefit of the doubt. We are more interested in people than in rigid rules about how things should be done. We put people first. We are genuinely caring and loving, not always looking for something wrong or negative but always finding the positive. We are cheerful and happy and giving.

We care for the poor and those who are looked down on. We stand up for them; we put ourselves out for others. We may not suffer physically for the sake of the gospel, but we are willing to sacrifice our time and what we have.

All those things do model the life of the one we say we believe in – Jesus Christ.

Some of you may have seen the story I shared on my Facebook page the other day. It goes along really well with our living like Christ.

An old Cherokee told his grandson, “My son, there is a battle between two wolves inside us all. One is evil. It is anger, jealousy, greed, resentment, inferiority, lies and ego.

The other is good. It is joy, peace, love, hope, humility, kindness, empathy and truth.”

The boy thought about it and asked, “Grandfather, which wolf wins?”

The old man quietly replied, “The one you feed.”

As believers in Christ, as Christians, we feed the wolf inside on God's word, on the life of Christ and his teachings, and the good wolf wins.

But we who are the church – the church being a community of people who believe that Jesus is the Son of God – are also called and commissioned by Jesus himself to go and make disciples. One of our greatest desires should be that others would come to know the love of God and to be a part of God's kingdom through Christ. We have a great hope that the church will grow because we are charged by Jesus to make disciples.

The book of Acts is so inclusive of all people – the rulers of Israel are given a second chance to repent and believe; the outcasts, the sinners, the poor, the Gentiles – everyone is included and given the opportunity to be a part of God's new kingdom in Christ.

But, Peter says, “Salvation comes through no other name but Jesus.”

That isn't a message we are as bold in speaking about today. We know people who are faithful in other beliefs and we are hesitant to say Jesus is the way. We don't want to offend anyone.

But I wonder ... if I'm hesitant to speak up for Jesus, will he be hesitant to speak up for me? If he is, I'm in deep trouble. If he isn't hesitant, then I'm in deep shame.

Peter and John healed the man at the Gate called Beautiful. And it threatened those who were in power. The Greek word for healing – *sozo* – also means “to be saved.”

And Peter said, “there is no other name by which we are *sozo* – healed, saved.” Through Jesus Christ, we are healed of our iniquities (our sins), we are set free from the bondage of sin that weighs us down and holds us captive and ultimately leads to death. We are healed of the results of death by being given the hope and promise of resurrection; we are forgiven, freed and made new in the name of Jesus. Millions of people have come to know this great joy of new life in Christ. People's lives have been changed – transformed!

The Church developed out of a bold belief that Jesus was truly the long awaited Messiah – the Son of God who takes away the sins of the world, who has reconciled humanity to God, who has revealed to us the love of God. The Church grew out of that bold belief - and the courage to speak about it. The Church came into existence and has continued to grow because the Holy Spirit gives power to those who pray for it.

And with the Holy Spirit anything can happen. And – it probably will!

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