

Acts 4:8-20

Isn't it kind of cute how a child will imitate his or her hero? Perhaps you too remember walking and talking like your favorite gunslinger, or football player, or comic book super hero! I still remember one of my friends at school drawing out the line from his hero, "Howdy Pilgrim!"

If earthly heroes can affect you that much, who is affecting your spiritual life! To adopt the attitudes, values, and lifestyle of people who are spiritually lost would destroy our souls, wouldn't it? So is Brittany Spears, or Elvis, or Paris Hilton really worth all the admiration? On the other hand, what would happen if we associate daily with Christ? Our reading answers that question, "What will happen when you are with Jesus?"

Peter and John, through the ascended Lord's power, had healed a crippled man. A crowd gathered, and Peter proclaimed the crucified and risen Christ to them. How did they react? Many believed. But the Jewish leaders, in their bitterness towards even the memory of Jesus, determined to crush the spread of His teaching. So they seized the two apostles and imprisoned them. The next morning they brought the disciples before the Jewish high court, the Sanhedrin. "By what power or what name did you do this?" they questioned menacingly.

Recall that several months earlier Peter was in the High Priest's courtyard warming himself by the fire as Jesus was on trial. A servant girl accused him of being with Jesus. How did he react then? With an oath and a curse exploding from his lips, he denied that he even knew Jesus! How does he reply now? It is by the Name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but whom God raised from the dead, that this man stands before you healed... Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven, given to men, by which we must be saved."

What a change! What caused it? Peter and John had been with Jesus. He came to them after He rose from the dead. He instructed them about His kingdom. They knew that He had come to the world to be our Substitute under God's Law. He came to keep it perfectly and then to die to pay for the guilt of all human sin. His resurrection demonstrated His kingdom is spiritual and eternal in heaven. Gone was their despair over His death. Gone was their grief and anguish when they thought they had lost their King. Now they knew their King was reigning in heaven, and by faith in Him, they too would enjoy His heavenly kingdom. What happened when they were with Jesus? They received faith in Him for eternal life!

Do you want the same faith? Do you too wish you could be sure your sins were completely taken away, be sure of peace with God, and be sure of going to heaven? Do you want the only relief that can bring rest to your soul? Then be with Christ! "But He's no longer here to walk and talk with me!" you might object. But He promised, "I am with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matthew 28:20). "Where two or three come together in my Name, there am I with them," He assures (Matthew 18:20). "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (John 8:31-32)! The night before He died, Jesus confided, "If anyone loves Me, He will obey My teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23).

So how are we with Christ? When we hear, learn, believe, and keep His Word treasured in our hearts, we are with Him! We are with him in worship and prayer. Jesus further established the Lord's Supper so that by it He, though unseen, might give us

Himself – the true body and blood which He gave on the cross for our salvation! As we are with Christ now by faith as He comes to us by His Word and Sacrament, we can be sure we'll be in His presence forever in heaven. John writes in 1 John 3:2, "Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is."

Right now, I want to speak to teens and pre-teens. Don't be surprised if you question everything your parents, your church, or the Bible has said. "Is there a God? Does He care about me? Do I believe what my parents believe? Does what I've been taught really work for me?" Despite your questions, and we all have them, stay with Christ. Salvation is found in no one else. Can you find a better Guide and Friend who accepts you, who loves you – pimples and all, whose values will lead you above peer pressure to do wrong things and enable you to be a leader in what is right and pure? God promises that when we continue to faithfully hear and learn His Word and receive Christ's body and blood in the Sacrament, He will sustain our faith that Jesus of Nazareth, crucified on Calvary's cross, but gloriously raised again from the dead, is the Son of God. Through Him you receive forgiveness of sin and eternal life. That's God's promise. That's what you get from being with Jesus!

Talk about peer pressure – Peter and John faced the highest court in the land. What especially impressed the Jewish council was their boldness to testify about Jesus. They had no formal training. Yet there they stood, talking bravely about Jesus with unembarrassed confidence. Peter and John didn't even hesitate to point out the Sanhedrin's sin in crucifying Jesus. They offered the hope that they too could turn to Jesus and have salvation. When the council ordered them not to speak about Jesus, would the disciples cave in to this demand? "Judge for yourselves whether it is right in God's sight to obey you rather than God. For we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard!" (v. 20)

Of what are you afraid when you live your faith or speak what's in your heart? Is the task of testifying to others or teaching your children God's Word the preacher or teacher's job, so long as we bring our offerings? Is that all Christ expects of us in building His kingdom? Are we afraid we can't find the right words to tell others of Christ? Do we fear scorn, rejection, or ridicule if we bring up our Christian faith? Do we suppose we've witnessed to enough of our family and friends, so now it's time to give up?

Someone has well said, "Where there is one soul who does not know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, there is a mission field!" The more time we spend with Jesus, the more we absorb His love, and the more our lives and lips will overflow with His praise! Your soul too will catch fire! You and I too will delight in telling others what we have seen and heard of Christ.

Unless people see they deserve only God's eternal wrath and damnation, Jesus will not mean anything to them. Perhaps you can ask them, "What would you do if you were God and people had disobeyed you and ruined the perfect life you had intended?" What you and I would do if we were God is far different from what He did. He still loved the world so that He gave His Son to take our punishment and pay for our sin. Truly, there is no salvation except by faith in Jesus. Live for Christ. Those outside the Church will get their ideas of Christianity from the way we live. You are born of God. You are sure to resemble your Father. When others look at you, they can't help but wonder, "Why

are you so different? What gives you that hope, faith, and love?" They too will conclude, "You must have been with Jesus."

Are others you know still not convinced they need Jesus? Are you still not convinced you need Him every day? One of the greatest heartaches and suffering you will ever go through is loneliness. Maybe you're feeling left alone right now. Those who could and should help turn away or are gone. You feel forsaken, left to yourself. The time is sure to come when you are left alone, and if it does not occur in this life, it will occur at the hour of death. I'm thankful to know then, when no one else can go with me, I am with Jesus. And He is also with you. Be with Him now and every day through His presence in the Word. You will receive faith in Him for eternal life. You will receive power to share the news of that life. You will never be alone. Amen.