

Sermon Study Guide (March 12, 2023)

This Week: Power Struggles

Series: When the Spirit Came

Passage: Acts 4:1-22

BIG IDEA: The Name of Jesus has the power to heal and the power to offend.

LOOK BACK:

Take some time asking how the week was in the lives of people in your life group.

Group Discussion: What power struggles have you had to deal with this week when it came to dealing with your values, or your character or your faith? What did these struggles teach you about yourself.



APPETIZER

1. Read Acts 4:1-22. **What do you notice about the passage? What details stand out to you? Who are all the characters and why do you think they are in the story?**
2. The expression, “No good deed goes unpunished.” It speaks to how deeds of kindness sometimes backfire. In the sermon, Jeff spoke about Ecotones, areas of land that are found between large land sections, like

mountains and plains, or land and water. These ecotones are brimming with life, but they also attract predators, so there is danger and death. Theologian Dean Pinter suggested that the Jesus-shaped life creates ecotones, where life (and life more abundantly) is found, but where there is also risk and danger. **Why do you think this is so?**



MAIN COURSE: LEARN TOGETHER

1. **Discussion:** The trial of Peter and John is a struggle between two different powers: the power of the temple and the power of the Holy Spirit. The temple in Jerusalem was not just a place of worship; it was the centre of culture, and so had social, political, and even military power, alongside religious power. **Is there a central powerbase in our society that is similar to the temple? Or are there multiple power structures that shape culture today?**
2. **Discussion:** Jesus talked about power, especially in relationship to his Holy Spirit coming (the disciples would receive POWER when the Holy Spirit came. Power to be witnesses of the message of Jesus). Have someone read John 16:7-13. **What kind of power does the Holy Spirit (Advocate) bring to the world that Jesus hints about?**

3. Question: Jesus came to bring life, salvation, and a restoration to his world and the people in it. But he also came to address the world's power structures. Christians have not always had a healthy relationship with power structures in our day. **What kind of power structures should Christians be addressing? And what should our motivations be? (Hint: Peter talked about both Jesus being the authority when it comes to salvation and restoration AND about justice, where the rulers crucified an innocent man, and jailed two peasants for performing an act of kindness in Jesus' name)**



DESSERT: LIVE FORWARD

Challenge: We all face power struggles when it comes to our faith and the values of this world. Peter used the power struggle that he was in to (1) Proclaim the Gospel and (2) Call out the powers. Both of these are difficult to do today.

Christians are not always comfortable communicating the Gospel. Further, we often “compartmentalize” our faith, meaning we thinking about the gospel when we are doing church things, but don’t think about them when we are in other areas of our life.

And recent stats suggest that the overall view that society has of Christians is negative. The majority of Canadians would see Christians as judgmental and hypocritical.

With these two challenges in mind, Christians need to be both HUMBLE and CREATIVE when it comes to living in the midst of power struggles.

CREATIVE. In what ways can you commit to “proclaiming the gospel” in the middle of the tensions you find yourself in? **What does this look like? And how can it be appealing?** (remember, the Temple Leaders were actually quite impressed with Peter and John, with their confidence in their faith, and how they looked like they had been with Jesus).

HUMBLE. Why would people see Christians as judgmental? When it comes to calling out the powers, have you picked the right or the wrong fights? **How can we call out the powers, especially when it comes to justice, in a Jesus-shaped way? What does this look like? And how can we do this without looking hypocritical?**

Pray for one another, especially when it comes to power structures. Pray that we would have the power of the Holy Spirit to represent Jesus well in the world. Pray that we will be reminded that “in this world we will have trouble” but that we can take heart, because Jesus has overcome the world. And pray that we are able to have the courage to embrace the ecotones that we find ourselves in—places of risk and offense, but also places bursting with life.