

“Peter Lifted Up His Voice and Addressed Them”

Acts 2:14

Years ago, a man appeared on a TV variety show with a table of water glasses. He proceeded to rub on the glasses and produce music. But one of the glasses was kept separate from the others. It was as if it was ignored, useless. Why was it there?

Many people end up their lives in care facilities where they are unable to do almost anything for themselves. They are like that glass, by themselves and seemingly useless.

But we don't have to end up in a nursing home to feel that way. Parents can feel useless to their children because they are so out of step with modern technology or latest social craze. Single people can feel left out in churches where so much seems to be about “family.” Young people searching for work or those facing a job loss due to downsizing can feel worthless. Many of us can picture ourselves being like the glass—all by itself.

That can especially be the case when we think of ourselves making God's Kingdom grow. The book of Acts tells us after all the amazing things that happened on Pentecost—the sound of a rush of a mighty wind, the flames of fire over the disciples' heads, and the disciples speaking in different languages— “But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them.” Can you imagine any of us being like Peter on that first Pentecost getting up in front of that crowd on the first Pentecost and preaching a message so profound that thousands of people came to faith? Pastor Todd Jenks at our sister church in town, St. Paul, has a doctorate in communication and teaches classes at Iowa State University. He says that the number one fear of Americans is not terrorism or cancer or climate change or even death; it is speaking in public.

On top of that, think of all the opposition people give to Christianity. Colonel Michael Madrid was denied a promotion because his Christian faith makes him reject same-sex marriage. Lance Corporal Monifa Sterling was court martialed because she refused to take a Bible verse off the wall from her work space. A geologist who followed all the right steps was denied by the US Park Service in receiving permission to collect rock samples from the Grand Canyon because he holds to a young earth understanding.

But even more in our world today the problem isn't so much direct rejection of our faith, but making it seem irrelevant. So much of our educational system is now what is called "postmodern." "Postmodernism" states that all views have value. It is okay to have a Christian worldview; just don't say it is better than any other way. People don't come to church so much because they have something against it; it just doesn't seem worth their time. Maybe someone with the charisma of a Peter can make the church grow, but me?

Peter? Making the church grow? "But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them." Do we realize how amazing that was? We think of Peter being the spokesman for the other disciples. But that wasn't because he spoke well.

The Beatles made cultural and music history in the 1960's. Most of their songs were written and sung by John Lennon and Paul McCartney, but George Harrison also did some writing and singing. But drummer Ringo Starr was not known for either. In fact, Lennon and McCartney wrote the song, "A Little Help from My Friends" specifically for Ringo to sing. It contains the lyrics:

What would you do if I sang out of tune
Would you stand up and walk out on me?
Lend me your ears and I'll sing you a song
And I'll try not to sing out of key.

Peter was the one who often "sang off key." Think of what Peter had said in the past. When Jesus first predicted His death, Peter rebuked Him. In response Jesus said to him, "Get behind me, Satan, for you have not mine, but your own ways in mind." When Jesus took Peter, James, and John up to that mountain where later Jesus appeared in a changed form with Moses and Elijah, Peter said, "I make three booths--one for you, Lord, one for Moses, and one for Elijah." Mark in his Gospel says about these words, "He did not know what to say." When Jesus told the disciples that He would be arrested, Peter said, "The others may leave You, Lord, but I never will." We know what happened later. Peter caves in and denies Jesus three times. Again and again with Peter it was, "Open mouth and insert foot."

Yet, "Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them." Jesus used Peter, one who had called down curses from heaven if he ever knew Jesus. Notice Acts say "Peter got up with the 11." Yes, Judas was dead, so that would make only 11 disciples. But back in chapter one the disciples had found a replacement,

Matthias. Peter. It could be claimed, had denied his status as a disciple. Yet, God the Holy Spirit used him to speak on Pentecost. Instead of putting a foot in his mouth, God put Peter's words into the lives of many people who came to faith that day.

“But Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them.” We could insert any Christian for the word “Peter” in that sentence. The work of many thousand coming to faith was the Holy Spirit's, not Peter's. No, the Holy Spirit is probably not going to give us the power to preach like Peter, but He wants to use all of us. The Scriptures give us plenty of examples of people whom he did use. I am not talking about the 12 disciples or Moses or David or Paul or John the Baptist. There was a woman named Tabitha (Dorcas, in Greek) who made clothing for the poor. She died and was raised by God through Peter. But even before Peter came to her lifeless body, a big crowd had gathered to mourn her. They were the people she helped, the people who learned about Jesus through her kindness. A paralyzed was healed by Jesus, but only because nameless people carried him to the place where Jesus was and lowered his cot by rope through the ceiling of the house where Jesus was. A nameless Israelite girl who was a slave to the wife of the general of the Syrian army named Naaman, told her mistress about the God of Israel and His prophet Elisha who could heal Naaman of leprosy. Because of that Naaman did go to Elisha, was healed, and came to faith in the true God. A man named “Legion” because of all the demons in him was cured of them by Jesus in the town of Gerasa. He wanted to follow Jesus, but Jesus told him to stay and tell people in Gerasa what God had done for him. We know from archaeology that an early Christian church existed in Gerasa, very possibly started by this man's witness. God can work through any of us.

My cousin was a pastor in Michigan. In seminary his preaching professor was Dale Meyer, who is now president of the seminary and was the Lutheran Hour speaker. As my cousin got up to do a practice sermon, Meyer told him, “Remember Reith, God even spoke through Balaam's donkey.”

God can and did do His work through people who were His enemies. He used the stubbornness of Pharaoh to make His victory at the Red Sea all the greater. He even used the devil to lead people to put Jesus on the cross, which results now in our salvation. If God could work through His enemies, think of how He can work through you and me who follow Jesus.

The glass of water seemed useless, all by itself. But after a while the musician touched it and it made a unique, but important sound. It was very important to the music.

No matter how weak or sinful or insignificant any of us thinks we are, God can work through us. “Peter, standing with the eleven, lifted up his voice and addressed them.” Peter was that water glass, seemingly by himself and too sinful to be used by God. Yet, God worked through him.

Jesus tells us in our Gospel lesson that the Spirit in us is like a fountain bubbling over. Certainly, the Holy Spirit revealed Himself in a dramatic way that first Pentecost. But water can do things even when it is not bubbling up or raging in a river. All the spring rain reminds us of how water is amazing at seeping its way into the foundations of our houses. It does that slowly and quietly. The Holy Spirit does most of His work slowly, quietly. The people who came to faith in Jesus on Pentecost were not just any people. They were those whom God had prepared by bringing them up in families where they knew and believed in the God of Abraham. They were looking for the promised Messiah. And God uses us to work with people He has prepared—the children we can raise in the Christian faith, internationals who have learned that they can get help at churches, neighbors who may have some exposure to church from childhood, people who used to be in the church, but have drifted away. Even you and me, the glass by itself, God can use in surprising ways.