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Peace, Sun Prairie
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Epiphany 3

Acts 4:23-31
Live boldly in a hostile world

*Lord, open my lips, and my mouth will
declare your praise. Amen.*

Dear friends in Christ,

In a matter of minutes, Job's whole world came crumbling down. All he owned, vast herds of animals were stolen or destroyed along with most of his servants.

Worse yet, the house where his ten children were staying collapsed, killing them all. In the midst of his deep grief, Job said this: **The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised!**

Have you ever wondered, if that was me, would I be able to boldly praise God like Job?

In the early centuries of the Church, the Roman government brutally persecuted Christians, giving them the option to turn away from Jesus or face a violent death.

Have you ever wondered, if that was me, would I be able to like them boldly confess Jesus even though it meant death?

If you, like me have asked such questions, our lesson from the book of Acts helps us see that really, we've been asking the wrong question. You see the power to **live boldly in a hostile world** does not come from looking deep within our ourselves, or from any of our natural powers or abilities.

As we see with the believers who **spoke God's Word with boldness** in our second lesson, the **ability** to do so must come from the **Lord**, the Maker and **Master** of all. Only God can give us the strength **to live boldly in a hostile world.**

Peter and John knew hostility. Our lesson picks up right after the Jewish leaders, had put them in jail overnight and then put them on trial. Their crime was preaching that Jesus is the Savior God promised

through all the prophets, the Lord who died and rose to forgive sins and bring eternal life to all who trust in Him.

Though the Jewish leaders had let them go, they threatened Peter and John and warned them to stop speaking the name of Jesus. It was now illegal for them to preach about Christ.

This was no empty threat. It came from the same people who had plotted to arrest and kill Jesus. Later on in the books of Acts they indeed turned to violent persecution and even murder.

In their threats to stop the good news about Jesus, we see the devil's age old war against God's saving Word. Satan can't dethrone God. He can't undo Jesus' victory over sin on the cross, He can't remove Jesus' crushing the power of death at the empty tomb. All the devil can try to do is get in the way of people hearing about Jesus in God's Word.

That's still the devil's goal in the attacks He brings against God's Word in our lives. The exaggerated claims of the evolutionist want you to be silent or give up on the Bible as he falsely claims his theories get rid of God.

Don't speak in the name of Jesus is the goal of those who label any attempt to speak about sin as judgmental or who would say talking about Jesus as the only way to life with the One True God is unloving and disrespectful of other's religions.

Of course, there's an enemy ally right inside of us, a sinful heart that wants us to be fearful of talking about our faith in Jesus, because it might make others not like us. The same sinful heart would have me despair at my own sins and think I can't ever talk to anyone else because of my own weaknesses.

So where can we go in the face of such hostility from without and within? Not to ourselves. If look to myself for strength, usually one of two things happens... either I become fearful and think what's the point, it looks like the sinful world is winning.

Or we might turn to a loveless boldness that lashes out at any opposition to our faith, maybe posting a snarky 'sort of Bible-sounding meme' on social media, sinfully acting like Jesus told us to go and win arguments rather than **go and make disciples**.

Let us go instead where the church did in our lesson: **They raised their voices to God... "Master,**

you are the God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them.

The believers turned to God in prayer. They saw they were helpless to face this attack. So they looked to the **Master** and maker of all, the One who has power to help. Or as the old song wisely puts it: *They are weak, but He is strong.*

They also turned to God's strong Word, to the verse of Psalm 2 which say: **Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers are gathered together against the Lord and against his Anointed One.**

They saw this new attack from the Jewish leaders as the continuing of the age old fight of the unbelieving world the Lord. The same hostility they saw foretold in those was verses was fulfilled with Jesus: **in this city both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and people of Israel, were gathered together against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed.**

These enemies all worked together in the events that brought Jesus to the cross. But the believers saw God doing something else He had promised, showing He

was in control! **They did whatever your hand and your plan had decided beforehand should happen.**

The enemies raged and thought they were getting their way, but in the end all they did was carry out the very thing God had planned: the willing sacrifice of Jesus Christ, God's Son giving up His life on a cross to take away the sins of the world!

Now God doesn't want anyone to turn to evil and oppose Him. He wants all people to listen to His Word and trust in Him. But when by their own fault, sinful human beings stubbornly oppose Him, God has the last laugh. He will use even their hostility to accomplish His plans for the good of His people.

We see it in the life of Jesus: the plots of the Jewish leaders, Pilate caving to Jewish crowds shouts of crucify and the cruelty of the Roman soldiers.

God used all these things to bring about the rescue a world of lost sinners needs: the death of God the Son upon a cross, suffering hell and death to win us peace and forgiveness! The very forgiveness Jesus brings us in His Word this very day to remove our guilt of either giving in to fear in the face of the world's hostility or

lashing out in loveless-ness. All forgiven by Jesus' sacrifice planned by God to save you!

And we see God turning the **raging** of his enemies out for good again in what happened in our lesson! The Jewish leaders thought they would win, that their threat would stop the preaching about Jesus.

But God used that very threat, to lead His believers to turn to Him for help, to look to His Word for encouragement and to ask Him to give them **the ability to keep on speaking with all boldness**. Notice didn't they ask for power to shame or destroy their enemies, or take away opposition, but simply asked for strength to speak God's Word, leaving the results up to Him.

And God answered that prayer, filling them with the **Holy Spirit** to give them the help they needed **to speak the Word of God with boldness** in the face of ever growing hostility!

Just think, God used the very threats and attacks of the enemies to lead His Church to even more boldly share His Word!

The result is that word has come down to you and me and countless millions down through history, so that

we too are comforted with the good news that in Christ our sins are forgiven, God gives a place in heaven and will work all things, even the plots of His enemies for the good of His Church, to see us safely to eternal joy and equip us to speak of His love in Jesus to a dying world.

Nothing has changed today. There is still hostility to our faith that wants to silence our speaking the truth of God's Word in love.

But the Lord is still the **Master**, still the one ruling all things for the good of His saving will, still using even the hostility of those who oppose His Word to carry out His loving **plans**. He has given us the same task, to use our words, the witness of our lives, our prayers and offerings and ministries we carry out together to speak the good news of Jesus.

Therefore let us always go to this same Savior God who keeps His promises and know that through His Word He will send the Holy Spirit as we also pray for the ability **to speak the word of God with boldness**.

So the question is not can I **live boldly?**, but rather, **Lord**, will you answer my prayers and strengthen me

through Word and Sacrament that I may live boldly to trust and speak your saving Word?

That's not a question, but a prayer backed by the promises of the God who loves us, saves us, and is eager to help us **live boldly** as we rely on Him. Amen.

The LORD's right hand is lifted high; the LORD's right hand has done mighty things! I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the LORD has done. Amen.