

**Preacher:** Audrey Hollenberg-Duffey

**Scripture:** Acts 4:1-22

As a child, it's easy to become embarrassed, especially when you move into that stage of development when you are trying to find your own identity. All children go through that stage when they begin to differentiate from their parents and get to know who they are on their own. Maybe you remember that time. When your parents would do something to embarrass you, you would turn the other way and say "I don't know them."

In the Church of the Brethren, it's hard to escape familial connections. When you introduce yourself in a Brethren context, the conversation typically turns to, "Oh, are you related to so-and-so." If you have lived in the same town your whole life, I imagine this is a similar experience. Your name connects you to a line of people. As you grow, you become an ambassador of sorts for your family. You represent them wherever you go, and you bring them honor by being successful and living well. Everything you do comes back to reflect on your family.

There's a verse in Paul's letter to the Colossians, a sort of blessing: "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (3:17). Do everything -- *everything* -- in his name.

Let's think about this for a moment. What would it actually look like to do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus — to be an ambassador for Jesus in everything that you say and do. This means not only going to church in the name of Jesus, or serving as a Sunday School Teacher, usher, deacon, or any of those churchy things in the name of Jesus — but to go to work in the name of Jesus, to go to school in the name of Jesus, to buy and sell in the name of Jesus.

How would it change the way we lived if we strove to conform everything we did to the way of Jesus? What would we have to do so we could honestly say with integrity that we did everything in his name? Could we tell a lie in the name of Jesus? Could we have road rage in the name of Jesus? Could we cheat on a spouse in the name of Jesus? Could we tell a racist or sexist joke in the name of Jesus?

Abraham Lincoln once asked, "How many legs does a dog have if you count the tail as a leg?" To which he responded, "Four. Calling a tail a leg doesn't make it a leg." Saying we do something in Jesus' name doesn't mean we are doing something in Jesus' name. We must truly know the one we represent if we are to be a good ambassador.

There is a scene in the opening to Disney's *Mulan* where Mulan's family is helping her preparing to meet the village matchmaker. In ancient Chinese culture before a young girl would be married she would meet with a matchmaker who would confirm whether or not the young girl was ready to be a homemaker and wife. It was important to make a good impression on the matchmaker because she would decide if you were worthy of an honorable match. This match would then reflect on the whole family.

In the animated movie, Mulan's family knew that her clumsiness had the potential to ruin her chances for a good match. So, to boost her good luck, Mulan's grandmother added a "lucky charm" to her outfit as they got her ready. She gave her a cricket in a cage. Throughout the movie, this little cricket does seem to bring Mulan good fortune even if not in the way she thought.

Sometimes I think we treat the name of Jesus like this lucky cricket. We treat our identity in Christ like a good-luck charm. If we just wear a cross around our neck, then that's all we need to do to represent Christ. If we have the Jesus bumper sticker on our car, Jesus will take

care of us. This is not what it means to call on the name of Jesus. Jesus is not our rabbit's foot or four-leaf clover. It's not something that we just casually claim, thinking that's all we need to for Jesus to take care of. To claim Jesus' name means that everything we do reflects on who he is and how others see him. To call upon the name of Jesus as we are instructed in scripture requires an intimate relationship with Christ. To truly do everything in Jesus' name requires knowing the way of Jesus.

So, we turn now to our scripture for this morning to see what it means for the disciples of Christ to be preaching, teaching, and healing in the name of Jesus Christ after the ascension of Jesus into heaven.

One day Peter and John, while on their way to the temple to pray, meet a lame beggar asking for alms. Peter having pity on the man said, "I have no silver or gold, but what I have I give to you; in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." However, the man doesn't only stand up and walk as he is commanded, but he enters the temple leaping and praising God. The people who recognized this man were in awe. While the healed man still clings to Peter and John, Peter answers their astonished gazes by saying, "Why do you wonder at this?... by faith in [Jesus'] name, his name itself has made this man strong...."

This spectacle quickly drew the attention of the Jewish religious leaders who had hoped that sentencing Jesus to death would put an end to this movement. Having heard about the healing, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees arrest Peter and John and bring them in for questioning. Interestingly, the religious leaders do not doubt that the miracle happened. They seem more concerned that it was these men who had the ability to perform such a powerful deed. They ask Peter and John, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" The "you" in Greek is emphatic, making it appear that the religious leaders are not only asking by whose power Peter and John healed the lame man but they are wondering who these men are that they are agents of such power.

The scriptures says that Peter is then filled with the Holy Spirit and responds, "Rulers of the people and elders, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are asked how this man has been healed, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." The religious leaders are amazed at Peter's boldness and, in that boldness, they recognize Peter and John as companions of Jesus.

However, in an attempt to gain authority over Peter and John, the religious leaders demand that they no longer speak or teach in the name of Jesus. But Peter and John answer "Whether it is right in God's sight to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge; for we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard."

"We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard." Their experience with Christ, his teachings, his actions, all that he did and said compelled them to speak. There was nothing else that could be done. No threat, no doubting religious leaders could keep them from preach and teaching what they had seen and heard. It didn't matter that these were uneducated and ordinary men, they had a purpose and a story to share. And the Spirit was undoubtably with them as they did everything in Jesus' name.

I remember very clearly the day that Bethany Theological Seminary celebrated the inauguration of their most recent president, the Rev. Dr. Jeff Carter. Jeff grew up in the Westminster Church of the Brethren and was called into ministry from that church. My Grandfather, Paul Groff, was pastor at the time so Jeff has always had a close connection with my family. When it came time to ask representatives to be a part of the laying on of hands

during the inauguration worship service, he asked me to both represent the student body and to honor where he came from. Along with a small group, I was able to lay my hand on President Jeff's shoulders and pray for him as he moved into this new and important ministry.

The one thing that I will always remember from this moment in the inauguration is the Rev. Dr. Jeff Carter's body shaking while we prayed for him. He was not shaking out of nerves, but more so under the weight of the hands on his shoulders and back. When people lay their hands on someone, they often forget that they transfer a little bit of their pressure onto the person and if they are not paying attention that weight can be quite heavy. With several of us bearing our weight on Jeff as the prayer went on, he began to shake as he tried to hold himself steady under the pressure. Not unlike the pressure he took on in this new ministry.

I imagine this is the way it should feel when we realize that it is the name of Christ that we bear. There is a weight and a responsibility that comes from claiming the title of Christian, which literally means "little Christ." If we are to truly be ambassadors of Christ, everything we do says something about who Jesus is and who he is in our lives.

Christians too often forget that it is everyone's job to share about God's grace and power. We have all experienced this grace and power through Bible study and other books, through teachings or sermons or testimonies. If we didn't, we wouldn't be here. This type of evangelism and sharing is often much more effective than what any preacher can accomplish on a Sunday morning.

We as Christians need to do a better job of branding. And by branding I don't necessarily mean having the Jesus-fish bumper sticker or even going around wearing your Hagerstown Church of the Brethren t-shirt, even though I do love seeing people wearing them. When companies hire people to help them with their branding, they try to create a unified vision that can be communicated effectively every time their name is used. Likewise, we need to make it clear that we are ambassadors of Christ and apart from him we can do nothing of any lasting good. When we serve our community, we don't do it as free-lance do-gooders or as a charitable organization. We serve in the name of Jesus Christ. And if we do any good deed, we must speak to the truth of the source of power. We must be honest that we rely fully on Jesus Christ of Nazareth.

In 1 Peter 3:15-16 we read "Always be ready to make your defense to anyone who demands from you an accounting for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and reverence." Brothers and sisters, it is not enough to simply say we bear the name of Christ. In everything we say and do, we must represent the Jesus who calls all to healing and wholeness and salvation. We should be as bold as Peter in proclaiming, "[Let] it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth." For "there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved."

In all that we say and all that we do, may we let it be known that it is only by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth. And may we feel the weight and honor of that responsibility. Amen.