

Focusing Our Faith

Session 2 – The Signs, Wonders, and Community Life of Acts Chapters 3, 4, and 5

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Hello, Deacon Butch here, and Welcome to Focusing Our Faith Session 2.

Over the next ten to fifteen minutes, we will continue our journey through the Book of Acts by focusing on the Signs, Wonders, and Community Life found in Chapters 3, 4, and 5. We will explore why they were so important to the Church of the 1st Century, and why they continue to be important to the Church of today, **and** the Church of the future.

But first, let's begin with prayer.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Glory be to the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

You may recall in Session 1, Deacon Paul spoke to us about *The Birth of the Church*, and “connecting the dots” between the Church of the 1st Century to the Church of today. That somehow the Church of 2000 years ago, and the Church of 2025 are still very much the same, even though the details of our situations may be very different.

He recounted how, starting in Jerusalem, Jesus and the Holy Spirit inspired the early Church to spread the good news of Jesus Christ to the ends of the earth. How the Church was empowered to fulfil its mission, and how we can learn from the unity and courage of the early Christians, as we work to overcome the challenges that we face today.

He also reminded us that we can do more, see more, and understand more when we are in community.

Today we are picking up where Deacon Paul left off.

As we begin, I would like to take a moment to teach you a little Greek. In fact, just one word: kerygma (kuh – rig – muh).

Translated to English it means “to proclaim, preach, or announce”. It also refers to the *initial core message* of the Christian community of the Book of Acts: *The Good News of salvation through Jesus Christ*.

The kerygma’s focus is simple, it proclaims:

- **God's love,**
- The effects of sin,
- Jesus's life, death, and resurrection, and
- The call to **repent** and **believe**.

Or as Peter put it very succinctly in Acts 3:13, “*Repent, therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be wiped away.*”.

The Apostles boldly proclaimed this message, the kerygma, to encourage people to encounter Christ and be converted. And it is in doing this that the story gets interesting! More on that in a minute.

So how do the Signs, Wonders, and Community Life found in Acts Chapters 3, 4, and 5, fit in with the preaching of the Apostles?

Let's take a look.

In Chapter 3, the first Sign we encounter is the cure of a crippled beggar.

Peter instructs the man who had been lame from birth to, **in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazorean**, rise and walk!

And it happened; he rose up and walked!

The Scripture tells us that the crowds were “amazed and astonished” as they gathered around to see the formally crippled man “walking and jumping and praising God”.

And it is at this time – *the miraculous sign and wonder of the lame man's cure* - that Peter took the opportunity to make a “speech” about:

- Who really healed this man (Jesus),
- The saving power of Christ,
- The sinfulness of the people, and
- He called them to repent, be converted, so their sins may be wiped away!

The kerygma (kuh – rig – muh).

The sign, and the wonderment brought on by it, drew people in and bolstered the credibility of the message of the Apostles.

But not everyone was “amazed and astonished”.

In chapter 4 we hear that while everyone was **celebrating**, and “coming to believe”, (5,000 were added that day!) the Captain of the Guard **and** the Sadducees’ were not. They were deeply troubled.

So, the next day Peter and his cohort were called before the Sanhedrin and questioned extensively.

Why?

You may recall that in the Roman world of the day, salvation was often attributed to the emperor who was hailed as “savior” and “god.” In his preaching, Peter is boldly proclaiming that deliverance and salvation comes from Jesus Christ, and Jesus Christ alone.

I think we can see where this is a problem!

So, what was Peter’s response as he stood before Sanhedrin? In a nutshell, it was the kerygma. And when they told Peter to stop, his response was bold and simple, “*It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.*”

Now when they were released, the community of believers gathered around them, prayed over them, and the Apostles continued to “*speak the Word with all boldness*”, and to perform “*signs and wonders in the name of Jesus.*”

Chapter 4 closes out describing the community of believers as people of prayer who saw to the needs of the poor and needy, while supporting the Apostles in their bold proclamation of the kerygma.

As you can see, Signs, Wonders, and Community were foundational to the success of the Apostles.

One of the main stories in Chapter 5 is the Apostles trial before the Sanhedrin. As I was reading it, I was amazed at how much it sounded like the trial of Jesus before Pilate. They were jailed, accused, they spoke truth to power, and frustrated the members of the court so much so, they wanted to put the Apostles to death.

But this is where things went differently. Rather than being put to death, a prominent member of the Sanhedrin, Gamiliel (guh – may – lee – uhl), called for their release saying, *“For if this endeavor or activity is of human origin, it will destroy itself. But if it comes from God, we will not be able to destroy them; you may even find yourselves fighting against God.”*

Basically, court had seen uprisings like this before, and it never worked out, so why would this be any different this time unless God was really with them.

Wow, Gamiliel (guh – may – lee – uhl) was spot on.

And as we know, the movement didn’t implode, it exploded, and we are here today because of it.

The conclusion – this movement was - **and is** - of God!

You may be thinking, these are all great stories, but what has it got to do with us today?

I think that the Church to which **we** belong is of God, **and** that the kerygma of the early Church - the call to conversion - is the same today as it was back then.

The signs and wonders which draw converts in are different, but the result is the same. They see something that attracts them, and they are drawn in to learn more.

In the ten years I have been coordinating the Order of Christian Initiation of Adults at St. Jude, I've seen this happen time and time again. Something mysterious and wonderful draws the Catechumens and Candidates to the Church, and now they want to know more.

I think that our living in community, sharing the Word and the Eucharist, healing the sick, and helping the poor and the needy are things we do now, just as they did back then. These signs, wonders, and support system, are the bricks in the foundation of our Faith.

So how is all this relevant?

What are the dots that we can connect from then to now?

I think there are three “dots” that the Signs, Wonders and Community of the early Church point to. They are:

- **Faithfulness** to the Word of God, the Eucharist, and the teachings of the Apostles.
- **Perseverance** in overcoming obstacles and oppression, and
- **Fellowship**, living in communion and community with one another and Jesus.

While we will not be hauled in before the Sanhedrin by the Chief Priests and the Captain of the Temple Guard and called to make an account of the message we are proclaiming, only to be flogged and told to stop doing that, we are still facing obstacles and even oppression to proclaiming our message of conversion.

What are some of these obstacles?

- Courts and government leaders have passed laws that restrict our ability to speak freely about our beliefs. For example, prohibiting religious gatherings in public spaces, and relegating us to 1st Amendment Zones.
- The new digital landscape has allowed the propagation of misleading or false information, which can be very difficult to refute or correct, and social media influencers can promote anti-Christian or anti-Catholic agendas which others, even other Christians, believe.
- Christians are still imprisoned, tortured, or even put to death for their beliefs. We hear of this in North Korea, Nigeria, Somalia, Libya, and Yemen.
- And with the vast number of congregations claiming to be the “True Church”, the Truth can become watered down, or even unrecognizable at times.

There are so many ways in which self-serving enemies of the Church can inhibit our spreading of the Gospel and calling everyone to *conversion and belief* in Jesus, that we may feel tempted to just give up, to let things implode if you will.

But like Paul in 2nd Timothy 4:7, we must continue to “*fight the good fight*”, because as Peter said, “*It is impossible for us not to speak about what we have seen and heard.*”

And what about the future?

Recently I attended the National Catholic Youth Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana.

During the conference, an amazing event took place. The sixteen thousand youth in the Lucas Oil Center were digitally connected - in real-time - with Pope Leo in the study of his Vatican apartment for a conversation and a question and answers session.

One of the questions asked of Pope Leo is very apropos to our topic today.

A youth was concerned about the Church and how it is preparing for the challenges of the future.

In a nutshell, the Pope told her that Jesus taught us not to be overwhelmed by worries, but to seek first the kingdom of God, trusting that everything else will fall into place. Jesus promised that the Holy Spirit would guide us and help us understand what we need to do as we face ***difficult and challenging times***.

As I reflected on his answer, I realized this is the way it was for the Church of the 1st Century, is for the Church now, and will be for the Church of the future.

I have included a video of this exchange, and the entire conversation with Pope Leo with the resources for this session.

So, as we discovered, there are “dots” that connect from the Church of the 1st Century to the Church of the 21st Century, ***and*** to the Church of the Centuries to come.

Faithfulness, Perseverance, and Fellowship.

It’s the message of Acts Chapters 3, 4, and 5 to the early Church, it is the message to the Church - ***all of us*** - today, and it will be the message to the Church of the ages to come.

Let us pray.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Heavenly Father, send your Spirit upon us do that we may remain faithful and persevere in bringing all people to conversion, and a love relationship with Jesus, where we will all grow in Your grace, peace, and presence.

We ask this through Christ our Lord. Amen.

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

May God richly bless us!