

Acts 4:23–33 After Peter and John were released, they went to their own friends and reported everything the high priests and the elders had said. ²⁴When they heard this, with one mind they raised their voices to God and said, “Master, you are the God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵By the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David, your servant, you said: Why do the nations rage

and the peoples plot in vain?

²⁶The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers are gathered together against the Lord

and against his Anointed One.

²⁷“For certainly, 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. ²⁸They did whatever your hand and your plan had decided beforehand should happen.

²⁹“Now Lord, look at their threats and give to your servants the ability to keep on speaking your word with all boldness ³⁰as you stretch out your hand to heal and as signs and wonders take place through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

³¹After they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken. Also, everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit, and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness.

³²The whole group of believers was one in heart and soul. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they held everything in common. ³³The apostles continued to testify about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ with great power, and abundant grace was on all of them.

Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus, dear brothers and sisters in Christ. What do you do when something happens to you that’s just amazing? When something you’ve been doing has been working, a diet, a way to clean windows, or fix a problem that everyone has? You talk about it, you share it. When your team is winning, in first place, when they’ve won the championship, you talk about them. On the other hand, when things you try aren’t working or your team isn’t winning, then it’s hard to talk about them, much less think about it at all. You turn to other things to talk about or to get you through your day.

Think about your faith in those terms. If God came down and visibly fixed our problems, if he had a visible presence in our lives for all to see, doing

amazing things on a daily basis, fixing this, taking away that, we’d talk about it wouldn’t we? We wouldn’t be able to help talking about our faith, our God, and sharing it with everyone.

But often and lately that doesn’t seem to be the case at all, does it. Things seem to be happening out of our control so that we’re left wondering at the very least, “What’s God doing? He’s in control? Really?” As we constantly hear about, and see, all the evil and corruption in our world today, we find ourselves turning to other things to calm our troubled spirits and to settle our anxious worries. “It will get better. It has to. The truth will come out. Justice will be served. The virus will go away. The government will fix the financial side of things. It will all work out, somehow.”

These thoughts sound harmless and seem like the right place to be — who doesn’t like a person with a positive outlook — but are they really the right place to be? You’ve heard me quote Luther before, when he said that “that to which you look for your highest good, that’s your god,” that’s who we’re worshiping and idolizing. It could also be said this way: that to which we look to for help or comfort, for safety and security, for hope, that becomes our god too. As we look to all these different places for safety and security, for positivity and hope for the future, we must ask ourselves, “Am I looking in the right place, or is this my sinful nature trying to look to anything *but* God?” As we see all the things going on outside of our control we must understand that nothing in this world will ever provide us with any of these things, none of it that will last, anyways. In this crazy, mixed up, and seemingly ever worsening world, God’s Word before us this morning directs us where to find safety and security, real, true, and lasting hope for the future.

Just imagine, the Apostles had the truth. They knew the truth. They understood exactly who Jesus was and what he did, how he had to suffer and die, and that he rose again in victory. And Jesus commanded *them* to spread this news to everyone. “Of course we will!” must have been their response. But not so fast. The same leaders that had gone after Jesus so ferociously and with such vitriol had now turned their sights on the apostles, on Peter and John.

It was the High Priests, you remember them, Annas and Caiaphas, who Luke records, **called them in again and commanded them not to speak or teach *at all* in the name of Jesus. After further threats they let them go.**

Called in by the high priests. That's what happened to Jesus. The same men who hadn't just threatened Jesus but had beat him to within an inch of his life, were now threatening the disciples. The same men who convinced Jesus' own people to demand Jesus' crucifixion were now demanding they stop talking about him. The High Priests didn't know what to do but no doubt hoped that after seeing their master crucified, threats would be enough to scare them into silence.

But when all things seemed to be out of their control and in the hands of the high priests, the disciples knew better. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they *knew* the truth. They knew how things *really* stood, that while things might be out of their own control, everything was still well under God's.

And so they prayed, not, "God we don't know what you're doing, but could you please fix it?" And side note: Isn't that how we often pray? Lord fix this. Lord, take this away, Lord, make this better. How often isn't it God's will that this or that should be happening in our lives, this or that that he's working out for our good, and here we are praying that he take it away, that he fix something that according to his will and for our good doesn't need fixing, that he heal something that according to his will and for our good doesn't need to be healed.

No, they showed their trust in his will by praying not that he fix something or make something better or take something or someone away. They began their prayer with the word "Master.: And that one word tell us all we need to know about their faith. They understood that at times things were going to look to be out of the control of God's people, but that God was always in control. He is the Master. Nothing happens without his approval. Nothing happens outside his ability to work all things together for their ultimate, eternal good. And so they prayed:

Master, you are the God who made the heaven, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. ²⁵By the Holy Spirit, through the mouth of our father David, your servant, you said: Why do the nations rage and the peoples plot in vain?

Everything people do against God is always done in vain. God's will will always prevail. They had seen the greatest proof of that as they saw Jesus suffer and die. The greatest and most heinous sinful act against God, and God used it for our good. God used it to carry out his will to save mankind from their sins.

So now, in their situation, what did that mean? As out of control as things appeared for those first apostles the answer wasn't, take them away, fix it,

make it better, make it easier, but, "**give us strength**" — give us the ability to carry out *your* will, to keep on speaking our faith in Jesus with great boldness.

And immediately God's answer came:**After they prayed, the place where they were gathered was shaken. Also, everyone was filled with the Holy Spirit, and they continued to speak the word of God with boldness.**

They make it look so easy. But don't forget who these men were and how far they'd come. They were sinners like you and me. They stumbled. They fell. Just look at how they acted during Holy Week. When things were darkest, they all ran from Jesus. Here today, we're seeing the culmination of years of Jesus growing and strengthening their faith through the constant explanation and application of his Word, and more recently for them, the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

That's what makes our time here in Word and Sacrament so important. The devil knows that this is where he can get us. This is where he can get his foot in the door of our faith and drive a wedge between us and our God. To have us see all that is going on in the world and in our lives and convince us that things are out of our control. And so often we take the bait. In our sinfulness we conclude, "If I'm not in control, no one is!" And so we reach out to anything that will restore that illusion that we are in control. How sinister Satan is! With little guidance, but just a nudge, a fear, a worry, a threat, we find ourselves straying away from God back on the road to hell.

Don't fall for the Devil's false dilemma. He's right. Very often, we are not in control. But that doesn't mean no one is. God is. God's control is ever-present. And what a wonderful comfort that is! Control is never something we have to worry about losing! Our God is the one who made the heavens, the earth, the sea, and everything in them. How arrogant we are when we think that if things seem out of *our* control, they're out of his too. That will never happen.

The same proof the disciples had is the same proof you and I have. God took the worst possible situation in our lives and solved it by giving up his Son for us. Jesus paid the price of the sins of the world, so that 2000 years later, when we were born in this world lost in our sinfulness with no control over our future, our only destiny eternal death in hell, God stepped in and took control. He brought you to faith through water and the Word and said, "I'm going to change your destiny. I'm going to relocate your eternity. I'm going to take all your sin and charge it to my Son. And the

perfection I demand from you, here, take his, take Jesus'." From that day it's been all God. And it will be all God from here on out.

If he worked out the solution to our greatest need by giving up his Son, we can trust that he will work out everything else too. No matter how bad, no matter how lost, no matter how sinful, we need not worry, fret, or fear. Things don't always need to be fixed, or taken away, or made better. Sometimes, very often all we need is a little trust in the one who controls it all.

Someone like a Good Shepherd. For today is Good Shepherd Sunday, and we see that God shepherding his flock is nothing new. Peter and John saw it as they looked to the past, Old Testament times. They prayed for it for their future. And they lived in it for the present.

May we do the same. As we look to the past, as we look to the future, as we live in the present, let us do so with the means God has always used to guide his people, the means he has always used to guide us: His Word and Sacraments, that there we may find the answer to our quest for comfort and peace, safety and security, justice and balance, for this life and as we look to the next. That while things may be out of our control, they are never out of his, not today, not tomorrow, not ever. Amen!

So what do you do when you have something this amazing in your life? You talk about it. I don't know about you, but I'm tired of talking with people in conversation about how bad things are. While there seems to be new things to talk about every day, we have something better to talk about. Our God and his ever-present control, based on his ever present love and forgiveness, and the ever-present gifts of new life and eternal salvation. May God make *us* bold to talk about these things, that many more would come to know him and his ever-present control in this life, and the next. Amen!