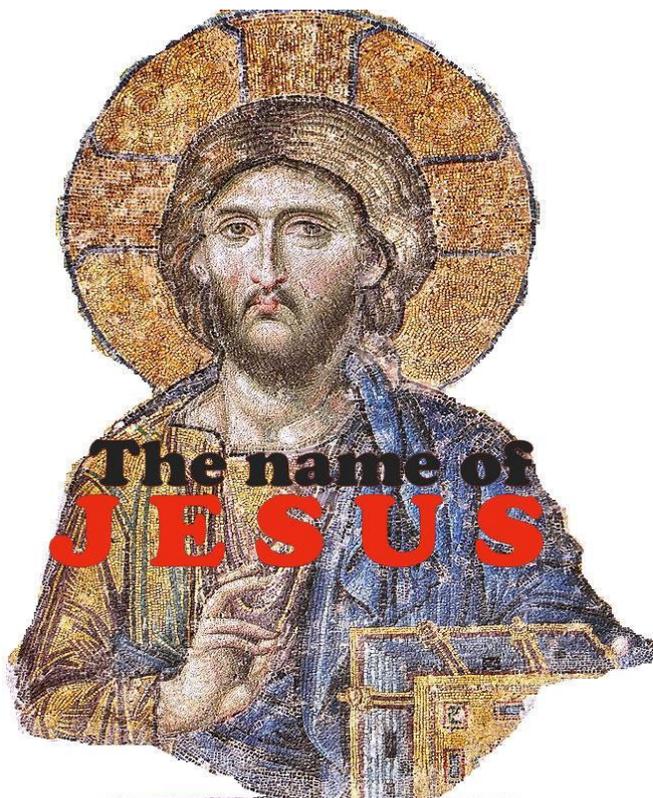


In our first lesson today, the apostles Peter and John are on trial by the Sanhedrin, the very people who had conspired to kill Jesus. Peter and John had, per Acts 4:2, been “teaching the people, proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection of the dead.”

This was right after they had healed a beggar outside the Temple who had been lame since birth. Instead of giving the man the money, Acts 3:6 says that Peter and John had healed the lame man saying, “Silver or gold have I none, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk.” And while the man had walked and leaped and praised God for his healing, Peter and John had seized the opportunity to teach about Christ Jesus, which had gotten them thrown into prison.



In our lesson TODAY the two apostles were being quizzed by whose authority they had healed the lame man. Had they called on an evil, malignant force? Had they called on the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? In other words, the Sanhedrin was giving the apostles the opportunity to shut up about Christ Jesus. Or else!

You heard Peter’s answer. Luke, who wrote the book of Acts, says that, “filled with the Holy Spirit,” Peter told the Sanhedrin they had acted “by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth.” And he added these dangerous words, “whom you crucified.”

Can you imagine the courage that response required? Peter might as well have signed his own death warrant. The very person who had denied even knowing Jesus to a lowly servant girl is now standing before the very people who had had Jesus put to death and claiming Christ boldly, fearlessly. A real change had come over Peter. Luke explained this change in Peter by saying he was, “filled with the Holy Spirit.”

Dr. Mitzi J. Smith, Church of the Brethren seminary professor of New Testament and the Early Church, writing for a publication called “Working Preacher,” offhandedly observed something profound

about this incident. She said that this was the first time in Acts that Peter was explicitly described as being “filled with the Holy Spirit.”

This fact, in and of itself, gave me pause. I’d never noticed. I had assumed that ALL of Jesus’ disciples had been filled with the Holy Spirit at the first Pentecost. You surely remember THAT event, 40 days after Christ Jesus’ resurrection: wind, tongues of flame over each person’s head, people speaking different languages understood by all. But here, in Acts 4:8, is the first time we hear explicitly that Peter was “filled with the Holy Spirit,” that he had been infused with courage to speak the name of Jesus.

Apparently Luke, who wrote both the Gospel of Luke and the Book of Acts, distinguishes between having the Holy Spirit fall upon us and being filled with the Holy Spirit. But that’s not all. Here’s the profound observation Dr. Smith made: No woman in Acts is ever described as being “filled with the Holy Spirit.” For that matter, I would add, no woman in Acts explicitly speaks in the name of Jesus, either. Even though women were present for the BOOM of Pentecost, the flames and tongues of Pentecost, even though those women had experienced the Holy Spirit falling on them, Luke always says those women were “full of good deeds.” Apparently, to Luke there is also a difference between doing good deeds and being filled with the Holy Spirit.

For example, let’s look at three prominent female Christ-followers in the early church, Lydia, Dorcas, and Phoebe. If you listen to how they are described, you can tell what the describer thinks the role of women in the early church to have been. Some say these women were “co-workers with the apostles.” Others describe them as disciples themselves.

Either way, though, Lydia, Dorcas, and Phoebe were instrumental in the success of the early Church. Lydia was a rich merchant who bankrolled the church in Philippi. The apostle Paul said Phoebe was a “diakonas,” a deaconess in a major seaport of Corinth before moving to Rome. A deacon is someone given the role of helping others; people argue about what, exactly, Paul meant by calling Phoebe a deaconess. Dorcas lived in Joppa, an Israeli sea coast town. She was known for acts of charity, particularly for making clothes and giving them to needy widows.

In other words, all three are examples of women Christ-followers whose good deeds were essential to the early Church. But Luke doesn’t say they were “filled with the Holy Spirit,” just filled with good deeds.

Of course, we could argue that the Holy Spirit is the instigator of all good deeds. We could also argue that Luke erroneously applied the cultural norms of his day to women. But, this distinction between doing good deeds and being filled with the Holy Spirit must mean something more than a prejudice against women. What IS the difference between doing good works and being filled with the Holy Spirit?

- Both might give the same help to others. Both might in some way change our world for the good. But good deeds point to us. By our good deeds we acquire for ourselves a reputation as a good-deed-doer. Whereas, Spirit-filled deeds always point to God because, filled with the Holy Spirit, we name God as the inspiration for the deed, giving God the glory.
- When we do good deeds, by the laws of biology and physics our deeds drain us of energy. Whereas, when filled with the Holy Spirit, our actions give more energy than they take. We can't explain this rationally, but it's true: Spirit-deeds fill us with energy instead of draining us.
- Our good deed doing can often lead us into insisting on our own way. But, filled with the Holy Spirit, there's only room for God.
- Good-deed-doers check their calendars and say yes only if and when convenient. Filled with the Holy Spirit, there's not a "NO. Because to say "no" to the Holy Spirit is to invite the Holy Spirit to depart. On the other hand, people filled with the Holy Spirit say always seem to get to "yes."

In summary, both Holy Spirit-inspired good deeds and actions taken when we are filled with the Holy Spirit may end up with the same God-work being done. The difference lies in the effect on the doer, and whose name the doer claims while acting: Christ Jesus or self.

More importantly, though, are the ones on whose behalf good deeds are done. If we don't name Christ Jesus in connection with our actions, will those who benefit from good deeds even know who to thank for the gift? How will our good deeds lead others to Christ if they think We are the source of the goodness?

What good deeds will you do this week, for Christ? Will you name Christ Jesus while you do those deeds?