

GETTING FIRED UP!

Are you tired of having an anemic faith, a faith that is weak and powerless? Are you tired of struggling with doubt? Are you looking for something more? Something that will make a difference in your life? Something that will make a difference in the world?

You are not alone. There are others. Like the first followers of Jesus. When we meet up with them in the reading today from the Gospel of Luke they were not balls of fire turning the world upside down. Not at all. When we meet them they were frightened and terrified. They were struggling with doubt. They were not the bold disciples we would expect them to be, just a pretty pathetic bunch of Christians.

By contrast, in the first Bible reading today, the reading from the book of Acts, we find these same disciples turning the world upside down. And amazingly, the story told in the first Bible reading took place just several weeks after the story reported in the reading from the Gospel of Luke.

A man who was crippled was begging for money. He was sitting just outside the temple - a popular place for beggars to gather. The man had been lame since birth and he was making a living the only way he could, by begging. It was about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, when two disciples, Peter and John, were going into the temple to pray and this man stopped them and asked them to give him some money.

Peter looked at him and said, "I don't have any money to give you. But I will give you what I have. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, stand up and walk." And he took the man by his hand and raised him up, and immediately his feet and ankles were made strong. Jumping up, he began to walk and dance and praise God.

When the people saw what had happened they were astonished. Peter explained that it wasn't by his power or by the power of the disciples that this man was healed. It was through the power of Jesus, the one who had died on the cross and rose from the dead on Easter morning!

And that is just one story of many about these early followers of Jesus. These disciples boldly told people about Jesus. They helped people who were hurting, like this crippled man. They took care of people who had no one to care for them. As a result, thousands of people came to have faith in Jesus Christ. And the world has never been the same. Today some two billion people follow Jesus. And it all started with this handful of men and women. They literally changed the world.

So what happened? What changed them? It was Easter! We heard the story this morning. Following the death of Jesus, the disciples were afraid and filled with doubt. Then they met Jesus, who had risen from the dead. They ate with them. They listened to him and he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures. That's what changed them!

Do you want to silence your doubts and fears? Come to Jesus. Eat with him. Listen to him. Do you want a strong faith, a faith that is dynamic and powerful? Spend time with Jesus. He's not dead and gone. He is alive and he's here. Let him feed you and open your mind. It worked with these early followers of Jesus. It has worked with countless people down through the ages. And it will work with you. The Risen Christ has been empowering Christians for 2,000 years!

There is a story that's been passed around about a white framed country church somewhere in Kansas. It

was situated on a high hill and so it could be seen from quite some distance. One evening just after sunset the church caught on fire. People from miles around gathered to watch the blazing inferno.

A local farmer who never darkened the doors of a church was one of the spectators. His neighbor saw him and jokingly said, "It sure is strange seeing you at church. What brings you out?"

"This is the first time I've ever seen this church on fire," he answered.

People notice when the church is on fire. The church, though, is not a building. The church is people. And when people catch on to what God is doing in the world, they get all fired up. Their faith becomes strong and amazing things happen.

One of my teachers in seminary, Dr. Robert Smith, said it this way. "The way God acted in raising Jesus is the way God always acts. The resurrection is not so much a strange and unique event as it is the most stunning and electrifying example of how God is continually acting."

Easter didn't happen so we could go back to our same old ruts. Easter didn't happen so that we could say, "Well, that's over for another year, now we can relax and not do as much." No! Easter happened to give us a powerful faith! Easter happened to set us on fire! Easter is part of God's plan to change the world.

The question is - are we going to be part of what God is doing?