



**Sermons from St. Marks
United Church of Christ
New Albany, Indiana**



How Can We Keep from Speaking?

Text: Acts 4:13-22

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Luke ends this passage in a very interesting way.

The story is a further continuance of the story of Peter and John healing a lame man at the gate outside the Temple. If you've followed the story, the reaction to this miracle was amazing. Peter and John preached, people were astonished, Peter and John were arrested and people are just dazzled, amazed, and mortified over all that is transpiring.

And Luke ends the passage by saying that the man who had been cured was over 40 years old.

Which isn't a throw away line. Luke is making a point that the man wasn't particular young, wasn't new at the gate and everyone in Jerusalem knew who he was. The end result was that this miracle was going to echo throughout the city for a long, long time.

All of this points us to the Sanhedrin, the ruling council, who have a problem.

The Sanhedrin were the ruling authority of the Jewish community in Jerusalem.

If they told the apostles to continue on doing what they were doing, if they told the apostles to continue to preach, they were acknowledging that the apostles were representing God, speaking for God, and doing God's work.

And by doing so they would state that the apostles had more power and more authority that they, the Sanhedrin had.

However, they have to admit that the healing of the lame man was a remarkable sign. It had happened right there, in front of everyone's eyes. They couldn't talk their way out of the miracle.

So, in an act of incredible cowardice they tell the apostles that they can go, but, please don't talk about Jesus any more. Peter and John are astounded and essentially ask, 'How can we can from speaking,' as the message they are carrying is such a message of hope and inspiration to all.

So that was a problem. They had an opportunity to embrace Jesus, to embrace a new way of looking at God, and they chose to remain the way that they had always been. So all they could do was to ask the apostles not to speak.

Sometimes people make catastrophic mistakes in life.

On July 11, 1804 two men at Weehawken, New Jersey, on the bluff overlooking the Hudson River, two men stood facing each other. One man was Alexander Hamilton, the other was the Vice President of the United States, Aaron Burr. The two men had come to despise each other. They were both heroes of the American Revolution, both were very influential, and they were angry with each other.

After an insult by Alexander Hamilton, Aaron Burr, in a fit of rage, challenged Hamilton to a duel. On that spot, overlooking the river, just across from New York City, two guns fired and Alexander Hamilton fell—he would die the next day.

And Aaron Burr's career, for all intent and purposes died.

Burr would say, later in life, that the duel, done in a fit of anger, was the stupidest thing he had ever done in his life. Hamilton, of course, said nothing. He was dead.

There is a monument on the spot where this took place. When I was in the seminary a group of us went to see it, to stand there, looking at this monument, and I remembered thinking, "What a waste. What utter stupidity."

Sometimes in our judgments in life we make catastrophic mistakes.

Second thing is this. The members of the Sanhedrin were afraid of change. They figured life was better the way it had been.

The Book of Ecclesiastes ask this question: *"Why were the former days better than these?"*

Often, in life, when life seems overwhelming, we look back to the 'good old days' and wish life could be like that now.

But I often wonder when the good old days were?

Were the 80's and 90's better than now? Probably no different, actually.

The '70's were loaded with Vietnam, drugs and chaos and recession.

The '60's had Vietnam, the drug culture, and a rash of assassinations as well as at time of great racial struggle.

The '50's had Korea and opportunity only if you were a white, middle class or upper middle class male.

The 40's had World War II.

The 30's had the Great Depression.

The 20's introduced organized crime to the United States.

From 1910 - 1920 had the first World War and global unrest.

The first decade of the century had vast amounts of immigrants fleeing disease and famine in Europe, often bringing it here.

Which makes you realize, of course, that the last century wasn't so great. We sometimes have paralyzing fear of change, but change isn't always bad. Often that which we try to retain is no better or even worse than what we change to.

Or, thirdly, sometimes, not unlike the Sanhedrin, we can keep from speaking because we miss the point.

Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson went on a camping trip. After a good meal and a bottle of wine they lay down in their tent for the night to sleep.

Some hours later, Holmes awoke and nudged his faithful friend awake. "Watson, look up at the sky and tell me what you see."

Watson replied, "I see millions and millions of stars."

"What does that tell you?" Holmes questioned.

Watson pondered for a minute.

"Astronomically, it tells me that there are millions of galaxies and potentially billions of planets.

"Astrologically, I observe Saturn is in Leo.

"Logically, I deduce that the time is approximately a quarter past three.

"Theologically, I can see that God is all-powerful, and that we are small and insignificant.

"Meteorologically, I suspect that we will have a beautiful day tomorrow.

"Is that all?", Holmes asked.

"Yes." Watson replied. "Why, am I missing something?".

Holmes was quiet for a moment, then spoke: "Watson, you fool. Someone has stolen our tent."

Have you ever noticed that about yourself? I have about myself. There are times, I presume I am correct, I am right. But all too often, when I lack perspective, I find myself wrong.

When I reflect on this story, I reflect on it from a perspective of foolishness or wisdom.

There are times we do not understand God. We are mystified by the ways, by the will of God. No matter what we do, we will not change God. Part of wisdom is learning to accept what we cannot change.

When I was in college, one of our New Testament professors, always prayed before class, and always prayed that we would be truly wise. I was always struck by that. He never prayed that we would be smart, and pass the course, but wise. I always wondered what he meant by that.

Since that time, I have spent my life, figuring it out.