**Just Do It!**

**Text: Acts 3:16**

**Preached by Bruce D. Ervin**

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It’s amazing how resourceful we can be when failure is not an option. 9 years ago I hiked 100 miles on the Appalachian Trail. My food consisted mostly of things that you can make by boiling water. Now that may not sound appetizing, but there are all sorts of gourmet treats that one can buy, backpack-ready, in powdered form. Just fire-up your one burner stove, boil water, add food, stir gently and *voila*; you have a nice meal for a tired hiker.

That is, if you have fuel for that little stove. And that was the problem . I was just about out of fuel. And it’s not like there’s a corner store in the backwoods of the Blue Ridge Mountains! So, I had to make a campfire. I’d never made a campfire. But, I knew in *theor*y how to do it. And, as one of my seminary professors use to say, there’s nothing more practical than a good theory! So I gathered-up some dry leaves, got some twigs and bigger sticks, built it up into a teepee, lit a match and – *poof!* – I had myself a campfire. Actually, it took quite a few matches, but anyway… Boiled my water, made my stew, had a cup of tea, and I was set for the night!

Just do it! Sometimes that’s what you have to do. You might not know how to do it, but somehow you figure it out.

That’s what Peter and John did. One day they were going up to the Temple in Jerusalem. It wasn’t long after the Day of Pentecost when, you’ll remember, Peter preached one heck of a rookie sermon and 3,000 people were saved. No doubt they were still feeling pretty high from the experience. No doubt Peter was feeling pretty powerful. Which was helpful when they came upon a man lying at the Temple Gate. He couldn’t walk. Maybe he’d never walked. And he was begging. Which took care of his immediate problem – he needed food – but it didn’t address the basic problem of his disability. The man needed to be healed. And Peter knew what he had to do. At least, he knew in *theory*. You’ll recall that the disciples didn’t exactly have a stellar track record when it came to healing. Sometimes they’d tried and failed, and Jesus had to show them how it’s done. But Jesus wasn’t around anymore – at least not physically and tangibly – so it was up to Peter to give it a shot. In my imagination, Peter took a hold of the man’s face, and looked deep into his eyes, and said, “In the name of Jesus Christ, stand up and walk!” And the man did!! He didn’t just walk, he *jumped* up! And then he commenced to walking and leaping and praising God!! And it might seem to us that he got a little carried away, but I dare say that you’d be leaping and praising too if you could suddenly walk for the first time in your life.

Just do it! Sometimes you’re confronted with a problem that you don’t know how to solve, and you just have to make it up. You have to act as if you know what you’re doing. You have to act as if the problem is going to be solved.

But you know what? Faith is acting “as if.” That’s what the late Hiram Lester said. He was an old Disciple who taught history at Bethany College. One summer he was speaking at a young adult conference in Ohio and he said, “Faith is acting “as if.” You’re not sure how to do something, but it absolutely must be done, so you act as if you know how to do it. And you either succeed or you learn from your failure but either way you can’t lose. Or you hit a rough spot in your life and you really don’t think you can carry on but you remember the scripture that says, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me,” so you act as if you believe it. And lo and behold it proves to be true. You act as if it is so and you pull off the seemingly impossible.

Peter and John acted as if they had the power to heal the man. And they did. But it wasn’t *their* power. It was the power of the Holy Spirit pulsating through them.

We have all kinds of power pulsating through us. Individually and especially collectively, we have all kinds of power. It might not be the power to heal, because maybe that’s not the gift that the Spirit has given to you or to me. Now there *are* people with that gift, and there are situations in which it works. I have felt the energy of healing hands, and I’ve known people who’ve experienced healing. Sometimes it’s a physical healing and sometimes it’s an inner, spiritual healing that helps people cope with a physical condition that isn’t healed.

But the point here isn’t the healing per se. The point here is the power of the Holy Spirit to do amazing things through us; to do amazing things through the Church: especially when we step out in faith and act as if amazing things are going to happen. Because they will. It may not be the thing that you *think* will happen. It may not be the thing that you *want* to happen. But amazing things will happen.

Because, you see, you’re not in charge; God is. It’s not your power, it’s God’s power. After the healing, when a crowd gathered around – and, of course, when a man who can’t walk is suddenly leaping and dancing and praising God, it *will* attract a crowd – when they gathered around, Peter said to the crowd, “Why do you stare at us, as though by our *own* power or piety we made him walk? It is by the power of the name of Jesus that this man walks.”

By the way, it’s interesting that in Acts 3:11, the healed man is *clinging* to Peter and John, just before Peter begins to speak. I guess the man overdid it with his leaping and praising, and he got tuckered-out!

In any event, the Church works and serves in the power of the Holy Spirit. To be sure, our text references not the Spirit but “the power of the name of Jesus.” These are two ways of saying essentially the same thing. Because, in the final analysis, it’s *God’s* power that does amazing things. It’s the power that called Creation into being. It’s the power that sustains the world and sustains the Church and sustains our lives through all that threatens to undo us.

The Church works and serves in the power of the Spirit, and that’s why we can dare to try things that we’ve never tried before. That’s why we can dare to step out in faith and do things when we’re not really sure how to do them. That’s why we can journey into the unknown, trusting that things will somehow work out. That’s why, in faith, we can act *as if* we know what we’re really doing. Because the Spirit, who is acting through us, really does.

Just do it. Like the juvenile robin that was sitting on our deck the other day. The poor thing was trying to fly, and it still had down on it! It didn’t look nearly old enough to be out and about without its mother. It was perched on the deck railing. Apparently it had flown there at some point, but now it had lost its nerve. Every once and a while it acted like it was about to take off. It would rear up on its legs and spread its wings, but then it would sit back down. Like it was afraid to try again; too afraid to fly again. I’d look at it for a while, and then go do something and then look out the window again but for maybe half an hour it kept almost flying and then copping-out. At one point I looked and it was gone. And I said, “Way to go, little bird.” And then I stepped out on the porch and looked down on the ground , and there he was: directly below the spot where he’d been perched. But he didn’t seem hurt and he didn’t give-up in the face of failure. By the end of the day, he’d flown away.

Just do it! Act *as if* you can do it. Spread your wings and trust that God will hold you up. Because God will. The prophet says, “Those who wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings like eagles. They shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint” (Isaiah 40:31).

It helps to get your ego out of the way. I mean, if Peter had seen the man lying at the Temple Gate and he’d said, “I’m going to heal this guy; I’m going to do this; everyone will see how great I am;” if that had been his attitude, it wouldn’t have worked. Because the power didn’t belong to him; it belonged to God. And I’ve found it to be the case over the years that when I’ve entered a ministry situation and I’ve said, “I’m going to do something great here – *I’m* going to do it – things don’t go so well. But when I relax and think, “Okay, God; just use me in whatever way I need to be used here,” things go much better. That’s why, sometimes, a situation that seems hopeless is more likely to become an occasion for hope and a situation where neat things happen. If things are hopeless, then it can’t get any worse. You’ve got nothing to lose; and nothing to prove. So you jump right in and experiment and things start to get better. Because your anxiety isn’t in the way, and your ego isn’t in the way. When those two factors are out of the way, there’s a whole lot more room for the power of the Holy Spirit to work.

And, of course, the Spirit is working right here, and right now. We don’t know for sure what’s going to happen at Bedford-First Christian in the next few years. We don’t know exactly where the Spirit is going to lead us as we move into the future. We’ve budgeted $5000 for the coming year so that we can engage a consultant who can help us envision the future into which God is calling us. With his or her help – and the Spirit’s guidance – we’ll come up with a plan for moving into that future. But as with all adventures into the unknown, we’ll have to make it up as we go along. We’ll have to act as if we know what we’re doing, trusting that with the Holy Spirit guiding us, we really do. We’ll be reviewing and voting upon that budget right after this service in our annual meeting. And you’ll have the opportunity to ask questions and challenge assumptions and share your wisdom about that budget and about all other aspects of our ministry together – which is really Jesus’ ministry – in this place.

So, are things going well? Yes! Do we know *where* they’re going? No. But God knows. And that’s all that we need to know for now. God knows where we’re going, and God is going there with us, and when the time comes to make crucial decisions and take decisive actions, we’ll do what we need to do. We’ll step out in faith. We’ll act with the decisiveness that comes with knowing that God is working through us.

And things will work out. Because we can indeed do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Thanks be to God. Amen.