

Series: Building the Bridge

June 10, 2018

## **Title: Truth to Power**

**[Slide 1]**

**Text: Acts 5:17-42**

## **Speaking Truth to Power**

### **The Cleveland Avenue Bus:**

**[Slide 2]**

On December 1, 1955 a 42 year old African American woman started a revolution. Her name was Rosa Parks.

12 years earlier she had boarded a bus driven by a man named James F. Blake. She paid her fare, then was told to get off the bus and re-board through the door for "colored people." But when she stepped off the bus, Blake drove off, leaving her on the street corner.

Now, 12 years later she found herself on Blake's bus. She sat in the "colored" section, but when the front of the bus became full of white people, Blake ordered her and 3 other African American passengers to give up their seats and move to the back of the bus. The other 3 moved; Rosa Parks stayed in her seat.

Blake said to her, "Well, if you don't stand up, I'm going to have to call the police and have you arrested." To which, Rosa Parks replied: "You may do that."

Rosa Parks' arrest led to a 381 day boycott of the city buses in Montgomery, Alabama. The day of her trial, 40,000 black commuters took a cab, carpooled, or – in most cases – just plain walked to work. Some walked as much as 20 miles! The boycott came to an end when the city desegregated the city buses because of a court order. And it all happened because a little black lady sat in a bus.

### **Speaking Truth to Power:**

Staying in her seat was Rosa Parks' way of speaking truth to power. She had no power to rewrite unjust and hateful laws. She had no power to tell the

police to stand down. But she could speak to power by living out her commitment to a higher authority and higher values.

The first Christians found themselves in a very similar situation in post-resurrection Jerusalem. Peter and John had recently healed a well-known handicapped person in the power of Jesus. When they were told to in no uncertain terms stop proclaiming the Good News about Jesus, they had to make a choice: Would they give up their mission or stand their ground?

They stood their ground. When they did, they were put on trial for their lives. The high priest accused them of trying to pin the death of Jesus on Him and his associates.

### **[Slide 3]**

*Acts 5:28 NIV*

*"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."*

The fact of the matter was that the High Priest and his associates *were guilty* for the death of Jesus. Now the High Priest was trying to avoid that messy fact and turn Peter's accusation back on the apostles as a terrible slander!

Peter's response? He spoke truth to power:

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*Acts 5:29-30 NIV*

*Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than human beings! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead – whom you killed by hanging him on a cross."*

Peter refused to be cowed by their earthly power. He stayed loyal to a Higher Authority – the God who raised Jesus from the dead. And he stayed true to the fact of Jesus' crucifixion at the hands of the High Priest and other leaders.

## **Speaking Grace to Power**

**MLK:**

## [Slide 5]

In a picture of Rosa Parks from 1955 you can see a young African American man in the background. His name: Martin Luther King Jr. Martin Luther King Jr. was a young, and mostly unknown minister of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church. When the bus boycott began, Martin Luther King Jr. was elected president of the organization that led the boycott.

King had a vision for doing more than speaking truth to power. He determined to speak *grace to power* as well. Listen to these words from his "I have a dream!" speech:

*I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood.*

King wasn't calling for kicking all the white people to the back of the bus in retribution for their past sins. Instead, he offered a way forward – one in which black and white would ride the bus side by side.

He spoke Grace to Power.

## **Speaking Grace to Power:**

Peter did the same thing as he stood on trial for his life before the Sanhedrin. After reminding his accusers of their blood guilt, he said:

## [Slide 6]

*Acts 5:31 NIV*

*"God exalted [Jesus] to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins."*

Here, right after delivering a guilty verdict to Jesus' murderers, he offers them the chance to repent and be forgiven! The same Jesus whom they crucified had come through Peter's words to offer a way forward. It's Peter's sincere hope that they will finally *listen* to what God is saying. It's Peter's hope that they will, like so many of their countrymen, see the error of their ways and turn around – repent.

Peter himself knew what it was like to go down the wrong path and then repent and return to Jesus. Peter knew the power of the forgiveness that

was unleashed in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Now he offers that same blessing to his mortal enemies.

That's what it means to speak *grace* to power.

## **Truth to Power**

### **"I've been to the mountaintop"**

The night before his assassination Martin Luther King Jr have a speech forever remembered as the "I've Been to the Mountaintop" address. In that speech he said:

*Well, I don't know what will happen now. We've got some difficult days ahead. But it doesn't matter with me know. Because I've been to the mountaintop. And I don't mind. Like anybody, I would like to live a long life. Longevity has its place. But I'm not concerned with that now. I just want to do God's will. And He's allowed me to go up to the mountain. And I've looked over. And I've seen the promised land. I may not get there with you. But I want you to know tonight, that we, as a people, will get to the promised land.*

Martin Luther King Jr. had come to see that when you speak truth and grace to power, God takes care of the outcome.

### **Truth to Power:**

When the court trying Peter and the other apostles finished its deliberations, it decided against the death penalty, opting to have them flogged instead. Luke tells us that:

### **[Slide 7]**

*Acts 5:41 NIV*

*The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name.*

They knew right then that the corrupt and evil system that opposed them would never be a match for the truth and grace that God had empowered them to proclaim. Luke says that "they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah." (Acts 5:42 NIV)

God has called you and me to do the same thing. We must always ask Him for the courage to speak truth to power, to culture, to injustice, to the subtle temptations that would lead us or others astray.

But even more importantly, we must speak grace to those same things in our broken world. We, like those first apostles, are witnesses in a higher court, speaking out God's truth and offering God's forgiveness and new life.

That is God's way. When His will is done:

**[Slide 8]**

*Psalm 85:10 NIV*

*Love and faithfulness meet together; righteousness and peace kiss each other.*