

BY THIS NAME

Back in 2009 our family went on a cruise to the Mediterranean. One of the places we made port was Cittavicia, Italy. Cittavicia is not far from Rome, so we hired a tour guide to take us on a walking tour of Rome. We saw the Coliseum, the Agora, the Palatine hill, the pantheon, and finally the Vatican.

Now, if you go in the Sistine Chapel at the Vatican, you are supposed to be silent. So, the Vatican has set aside a courtyard where they have several placard signs of each painting there so that the tour guides can describe the painting to you. So, we went to the courtyard and our guide began describing the painting to us. All of a sudden, this woman came up and held an animated discussion with our tour guide. After the discussion she turned and smiled and began to talk in Italian to the group that was with her.

Our tour guide said to us, "I'm sorry we have to move." It turns out that the Vatican has policy that their tour guides have preference. There were several placards there of the same painting. The woman could have easily shown her group the painting at another placard. Instead, she chose to come and ask, "Who are you? What authority do you have to be here?" I don't know what that woman's issue was; perhaps, she felt that we should have signed up for a Vatican tour, giving our money to the Vatican itself; perhaps, she was jealous that we hadn't chosen her; I don't know. What I know is that she questioned his right to be there, and we had to move.

There's a back story to the passage I just read. The story really begins when Peter and John are approached by a lame beggar. They heal the beggar and then Peter preaches in the name of Jesus Christ to the crowd that has assembled and is marveling. The chief priests and the temple guards, and the Sadducees lay hands on them and arrest them. They take them away and place them in jail because it is already late. The passage I read begins the next day when the authorities bring the prisoners back before them. Then they ask them, "By what power or by what name did you do this?" In other words, by what authority did you do this?

Peter's response is interesting. "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who is sick and are asked how this man has been healed." In other words, if you're going to punish me for doing a good deed, I'll be glad to tell you how I did it. I did it in the name of Jesus Christ.

Now, I want to say that this passage tells us something about the authorities, but it also tells us something about Peter. He doesn't appear to have any fear about saying he did this by the power of Jesus Christ. So, he heals people, and he preaches to people fearlessly. So, if Peter is willing to do this in the name of Jesus Christ, because of his belief in Jesus Christ, why can't we do the same? What does that say about us?

What I'm realizing is that the problem doesn't lie with our belief in Christ. I think you many people have a deep- seated faith in Christ. I'm not questioning that. What I think is that we don't have faith in ourselves or in others. We don't have enough confidence in yourselves to go out and do these things. Now, maybe I'm wrong about that, but that's my opinion and it's my turn to talk now; I'm the preacher.

Let me give you some examples. We all know that the bible tells us to share our faith; go out and make disciples; share the good news. Yet, in my experience, few of us do it. I really think that fear plays a huge part in our reluctance to do it. We're afraid we won't get the details right. We're afraid we don't know enough. We're afraid we won't be persuasive enough. Or, maybe, we're afraid that we will be ridiculed. So, we don't do it.

We all know that the bible tells us to comfort one another. Yet when we find ourselves confronted by someone who needs love and compassion, do we help? Or do we ignore it? Or do we call the preacher and delegate the problem? I suspect many of you will tell me you don't know what to say. I suspect you don't have faith in your ability to comfort them. I'm going to say- you don't have to know what to say. What matters is that you love the person. What matters is that you care. The person may need me, but I promise you they need you just as much.

We all know that the bible calls us to forgive. The bible calls us to reconcile our differences. But it's easier to stay mad. It's easier to give reign to our feelings. It's not so easy to let go of the hurt. So, we don't try, because we don't have faith in our ability to do that.

All of us know that we're supposed to be a friend to the friendless- that we are supposed to welcome and accept others. I must say that this church does that better than any church I have ever seen. However, most churches don't do that well. It's not that we don't think that's what Christ wants. It's that we lack faith in ourselves. We know these people over here like us. We don't know if the stranger will or if we will like them. So, we hang back.

We all know that the bible calls us to give of our time and money, but we hang on to both. We're not sure that our money will be used well. We're not sure that people will appreciate what we do. We're not sure it does any good. We're also afraid that people will criticize our efforts. They'll say, "You know that homeless person is just going to spend that money on liquor. They're not going to use it for food." My response to that is, "Maybe so, but that's on them, not me." We don't have faith in ourselves or faith in others.

But it appears to me that Peter isn't worried about all that. Peter remembers something that we often forget. We are doing this in the name of Jesus Christ, the risen Lord. We don't have to worry about whether or not we do it well. We're not doing it for ourselves. We are doing it in the name of the Lord. We are doing it by his name and under his authority.

If we share the good news, and the other person doesn't believe, that's okay. It is the responsibility of the Holy Spirit to convert others- you are just the mouthpiece. You are speaking in his name and by his authority. You have nothing to fear.

If you are in a position to comfort someone, you have nothing to fear. You are ministering to the person in the name of Jesus Christ and by his authority. You have nothing to fear. You are God's embracing arms in that moment. It doesn't have to be perfect-it just needs to be heartfelt.

I could go on and on, but you get the point. You don't have to get it perfect, because you are not doing this in your own name. You are ministering in the name of Jesus Christ and by his authority. Just give it your best effort and let God do the rest. Because you are ministering by this name: the name of Jesus Christ; the name that is above every name; the name that causes every knee to bow and every tongue confess. By this name- the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.