

Whenever I get finished reading a chunk of scripture link this with the youth, I start out asking "Well, what the heck is going on here?" and seeing what kind of response I get, where everybody is with the verses, what stuck out to them. And I've started doing that with myself as well, especially looking at something that I'm going to be teaching.

So a couple of weeks ago when I looked up the lectionary readings for today and went through this bit of Acts, and I asked myself "What's going on here?", I saw a group of guys who just got busted. Just BUSTED. Have you ever gotten busted?

When I was in high school I was in marching band. And my senior year my class had an ongoing senior prank on Mr. James, our band director. Starting before the beginning of the school year, in July while we were at band camp at Chowan College, Mr. James brought his bicycle with him. He would use it to ride all over campus and check on different groups when we were split up into sectionals or drill groups. We could be all over the practice fields or the tennis court and he would come and see what was going on in each place and then ride his bike back to the auditorium or the cafeteria. Now, he had brought his bike, but he didn't bring any way to secure it. So he would park at the cafeteria and walk inside, and one of the seniors would walk out and get on his bike and ride it off to some hiding place before he could catch us.

After the first day of this, he started taking the front wheel off his bike, as if that would stop us. We just threw it over our shoulders and ran off with the thing. But by the end of the second day, we were bored of this, and so Wednesday we took some rope from the drum majors' pulley system in the crow's nest, and we began hanging Mr. James bike from various places. He came back to the dorm, and there it was Wednesday afternoon hanging from the girls' balcony. He walked out to the practice field on Thursday, and there it was 40 feet up in the air on the crow's nest. By Friday we got ambitious and drove the truck across the street, climbed on top, and put the bike on the roof of the building that faced our dorm. And this continued when we returned to Elizabeth City and the school year began.

So one day at the end of last period, two of my fellow conspirators and I got ambitious again. Mr. James would use a ladder to climb on the roof of the band room to videotape our field show. So we propped the ladder up and somehow I got the job of climbing to the roof and the other two threw the bike up to me. But we quickly decided that right on top of the band room, no one would see this. So I took the bike down the length of the roof, and across the adjoining perpendicular roof of the auto shop classroom, and back down the roof of the breezeway, ending directly across from my original position, and in direct view of the classrooms and the back door of the band room.

Well, "direct view" was the problem. It was the end of the day, and I hadn't taken into account the fact that the school bell could not be heard from inside some of those annex building classrooms. At 5 minutes until the end of 4th period, the auto shop teacher would walk outside his classroom every day and listen for the bell to ring in the band room or the cafeteria. It was now the very end of the day and he walked outside his classroom to see me, on the roof, on a bike.

I looked at him, and he looked at me, and he said "What are you doing?" Busted. Just busted. I was mentally 8 steps ahead of this conversation already. I knew he wasn't happy, and he'd get me off the roof and march me to the principal's office, and he would be even less happy, but he'd call my mom and she'd be even less happy. But there was nothing I could do about that situation because he was clearly looking right at me and asking "What are you doing?" So knowing that my fate was inevitable but still being just a little bit proud and amused by putting a teacher's bike on the roof, I just told him. "It's Mr. James bike and this has been our senior prank on him for months."

I guess he was expecting guilt and shame and begging and pleading because he just looked at my quizzically at that point and said "That's Mr. James' bike?" And I said "Yeah." And he said "So he knows you're up there?"

I'm glad phrased it like that. And I'm glad he didn't lead with that question. Because three sentences into this conversation at this point, I had time to look at him, look at my friends on the ground who were going "Uh-huh" and turn back to him and say "Uh-huh."

So he just said "Ok." ...and turned and walked back into the auto shop class.

I got busted. But I just kept on and somehow it was all okay.

Now I am not advocating most aspects of my behavior in that story. And I realize how horrible an example it is up against Peter and the Apostles here preaching and doing signs and wonders in the name of Jesus. But they got busted. I mean really busted. If you go back just a few verses in this chapter they've already been arrested once, and thrown in jail, and set free by an angel of the Lord, and here they are back at it again, preaching and teaching and healing and doing signs and wonders, to the jealous anger of the high priest and the Sadducees, and they're arrested again. It's like a Forrest Gump story here. "So I went to Solomon's Colonnade *again*. And I got arrested *again*. And I met the Sadducees *again*." At least they were given a speedy trial this time. The guards took them right in to the Sanhedrin immediately and they're questioned by the high priest himself. And he's like "We busted you. And we busted you yesterday. What are you doing?"

So Peter says basically "We're obeying. We're just not obeying you. We answer to a higher authority. We answer to God. And we're obeying him. And because we are obeying him he is empowering us."

And that is all important and I'm going to come right back to that in a second. But just like I backed up to the beginning of this story, we have to back up a little bit in what Peter's saying to get to where Peter is. Because he's talking about their actions which spring from obedience. But that obedience has got to follow *listening* to God.

How did Peter and the Apostles know to go back to the Colonnade and keep doing what they were doing? An angel broke them out of jail and *told* them to. How did they know to go there in the weeks leading up to this, though? Because Jesus *told* them to. Right before he Ascended into Heaven right in front of them, he said to them, and to us through them, that the apostles would be his "witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth." He told them. They heard. They listened. And then they obeyed. They acted.

Have you ever looked at the names of the books of the Bible? This story comes out of Acts. The Acts of the Apostles. This is one of just a handful of books that aren't named somebody's name. You've got the beginning of the Bible, Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and after that, you've got almost exclusively names of individuals or groups. Joshua: the story about Joshua. Judges: the story about leaders of Israel. Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Job on through the New Testament to Malachi. And into the New Testament. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, books written by those guys (or somebody). And then after the Gospels and Acts you've got the Epistles. The letter written *to* the Romans. *To* the Philippians. *To* the Hebrews. So what is this book? The book right after the gospels? Acts. The book about the Apostles doing stuff.

We've moved from the Gospels to Acts. We've moved from the story of Jesus' life to their response. We've moved from the teaching to the practice. They heard the Gospel. They listened to what Jesus told them to do. *Now* they're being obedient. *Now* they're living it.

Because as Peter told the high priest, they couldn't do anything else. "We *must* obey God," he told them. "He raised Jesus from the dead," he told them. This dude's excited. Because before the high priest busted him, Jesus just busted his whole life. He cannot help but be excited.

So are you listening to God? Because when you are you can't help but be excited. And as you obey you can't help but be empowered, because as Peter said "We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Look at where we are in the Christian year. Last Sunday was Easter. We just celebrated what these guys had just lived, and what they were talking about. They got arrested for talking about the Resurrection. For being excited about the Resurrection. That we just read about. That we just talked about. That we just sang about. That we just celebrated. With ties and dresses and lilies and fanfares and singing and eating and family and chocolate and sleeping from noon until the next day if you had anything to do with those services last week. It was a big deal.

And it still is. You probably know the song "The Twelve Days of Christmas" and you might even know that those twelve days *start* on Christmas and continue until Epiphany. Christmas day is the *start* of Chrstmastide. Easter is the same way. Last week was the *start* of Eastertide. We've got a new color on the altar and that *started* last week. Easter is the *start* of all the excitement.

Eastertide has traditionally been the time in the church where we focus on doctrine and ministry. *What* we believe and *how* we live it out. Back in the day, and still in certain traditions, all the new Believers were baptized into the faith community on Easter day, so the following weeks were ones of formational teaching to them and a refresher course to the rest of the Church. They learned and we learn in worship what it is to be members of the community of believers. We learn creeds that summarize what we believe. We sang one this morning in the contemporary service. We sing songs and hymns and we recite prayers that remind us of our relationship with and identity in Christ Jesus. We're getting ready to go through one in a few minutes in the Service of Word and Table that talks about what Peter was talking about. We're going to pray to God and confess to him that "we have failed to be an obedient church, we have not done your will, we have broken your law..." But then we pray to be forgiven, and freed for *joyful obedience*.

When you have to be obedient, it's seems almost as hard to be joyfully obedient as it is to be full of the "fear and joy" that Pastor Joe talked about last week, and was spoken of at his wedding yesterday. But here we have another example from Peter and the Apostles, who take their minor punishment from the Sanhedrin and leave rejoicing and then it says "they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah."

What are you so excited about that you can't help but rejoice? What are you so excited about that you can't help but proclaim? There are a lot of things I'm excited about around First United Methodist. I'm excited about Youth Ministry. I'm excited about our Summer Mission to Ecuador. That's something that I approach with fear and great joy. Fear when I look at the numbers and the dates and the planning and rejoicing when I think about my worlds colliding and my brothers and sisters on two containments getting to know each other and serve one another and with one another and worship

together and to just be busted by Jesus Christ and be broken and remade. I'm excited about the ways we are talking about incorporating technology around here and how that whole movement came about because some people on the 90th Anniversary Committee asked almost a year ago how they could be obedient and share what they were excited about in the Church and they listened to what God was telling them. I'm excited by movement in our Sunday School, and by things I'm not even directly involved in but I get to watch and hear about like Cooking for Christ and Room at the Inn. And all of these things that cause so much rejoicing and such worship came out of obedience that came out of listening.

So I ask again. What are you so excited about that you can't help but rejoice? What are you so excited about that you can't help but proclaim? If you don't know, then take a step back and ask God and then *listen*. And when we do know, let's have our lives so busted by Jesus that we obey and act.