Up before the beak

(a drama based on Acts 4)

***Scene****: the high priest’s courtroom in Jerusalem shortly after the ascension of Jesus.*

***Cast****: Annas, the high priest, chairman of the bench; Caiaphas, the other high priest, on his right; Gamaliel, an older Pharisee on his left; Peter; John; Daniel, a Cockney beggar who has been healed; Captain of the Temple Guard; if available, some other guards (non-speaking).*

*The three magistrates are seated behind a table facing the audience. The dock is downstage on one side but does not need to have any physical presence. If there are assistant guards they can stand behind the accused to prevent them from escaping. The Captain of the Guard speaks from downstage the other side once he has put the accused in the dock. Both Captain and the accused need to ensure that they are speaking to the bench but side on so that the audience can hear. Peter and John remain calm and still in the dock; Daniel is constantly moving around, practising using his legs which do not want to stay still.*

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| Captain | (*Leading guards who bring Peter, John and Daniel up through the audience to the entrance to the stage*) Three men who have been disturbing the peace in the Temple, your Honour. |
| Annas | Thank you, Captain. Put them in the dock. (*Captain moves the three to the dock, then, goes himself to the other side.*) Now, tell me what you saw. |
| Captain | I was on duty at 11 o’clock yesterday morning when the three men you see before you came into the temple. The one on the right was jumping around and shouting out, repeating “Praise God!” and “I can walk!” at the top of his voice, making it impossible for anyone else to concentrate on their prayers. A crowd gathered excitedly around the three of them, asking what was going on, and the one on the left started preaching without authority. There was quite a commotion, so I thought it best to put them in jail for the night and call this court together, your Honour, so that you could decide what to do. |
| Annas | Thank you, Captain. Now, you three, tell me your names and where you come from. |
| Peter | I am Simon son of Jonah from Capernaum, your Honour, known as Peter. |
| John | I am John son of Zebedee, also from Capernaum, your Honour. |
| Daniel | And I am Daniel son of Benjamin from Jerusalem. |
| Annas | So tell me, Daniel, why were you shouting out and disturbing the peace of the temple? |
| Daniel | Beg pardon, your ’onour, but I was begging at the temple gate like I ’ave every morning for the last 20 years, seeing as I was crippled and couldn’t get a job to feed myself. |
| Captain | (*interrupting*) Good God! |
| Annas | Silence in court! How dare you take the name of the Lord your God in vain, Captain? |
| Captain | I’m very sorry, your Honour. But as he was speaking, I recognised him.  |
| Annas | What do you mean, Captain? |
| Captain | He’s Dan from the temple gate. Been begging there for as long as I can remember. Depended entirely on his friends to bring him and take him away each day. Totally crippled – could hardly move. Nice guy, though, never caused any trouble. I’ve even given him a few coins myself. |
| Annas | That will do, Captain. Now Daniel, I want you to walk across to the Captain and back. (*Daniel obeys, watched by everyone*.) It is obvious to me that you are not a cripple and that begging for many years as if you are is a serious case of fraud.  |
| Daniel | Beg pardon, your ’onour, but I was crippled until yesterday. Then Peter and John ’ere comes to the temple, and I says to ’em, “Spare some change, guv’nor?” and they looks at each other, ’n Peter says “Look at me!” So I looks at ’im, ’n ’e says they don’t ’ave nuffink in their pockets, but they got summat far better. Then ’e says to me, “In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, rise up ’n walk!” ’N ’e grabs me by the arm ’n pulls me up, ’n as ’e does so I feels muscles growing on me legs which I never used in over 40 years since I were born. So I ain’t no fraud, ’n you can’t stop me praising God, ’cos ’e’s given me me legs back ’n I can walk and jump ’n I don’t need no-one to ’elp me move around no more. |
| Annas | I’ve heard quite enough from you. Peter and John, who authorised you to preach in the temple? |
| Peter | Your Honour, if we are being called to account for an act of kindness to a crippled beggar, let the temple authorities and the whole world know this. This man stands before you completely healed in the name of Jesus of Nazareth, whom you crucified, but God raised him from the dead and has made him both Lord and Christ.  |
| Caiaphas | How dare you speak to the High Priest like that! |
| John | He is the stone, which you builders rejected, which has become the cornerstone. Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to mankind by which we must be saved. |
| Annas | Silence in court! The court will adjourn while we consider our judgment. Captain, take these men to the cells until we call you. |
| Captain | Yes, your Honour. (*Exit with Peter, John, Daniel and rest of guard*) |
| Annas | (*to Caiaphas and Gamaliel*) Now, what are we going to do with these men? |
| Caiaphas | They have been with Jesus. We must clamp down on them with the utmost severity. |
| Gamaliel | Everyone knows they have done an outstanding miracle. We can hardly deny it – there’s that beggar – he can hardly stand still. |
| Caiaphas | Throw the book at them. They’re just simple country folk. A good flogging will make them think.  |
| Annas | I’m not so sure. We thought we’d got rid of Jesus, and look what happened. |
| Gamaliel | The crowd are hanging on their every word. We can’t be sure how they’d react if we flog them. Besides, we can’t flog them for healing a cripple. |
| Caiaphas | Not that. For undermining the temple authorities and fomenting rebellion. |
| Annas | We have to stop them spreading this nonsense further. Let’s call them back. (*Shouting*) Captain! Bring them back! |
| Captain | (*Offstage*) Yessir! (*Returns with the prisoners and guard*) |
| Annas | Now, you three. We have been considering having you flogged, but as it’s a first offence we will let you go, on condition that you agree to speak no more to anyone in this name. |
| Peter | Which is right in God’s eyes – to obey God or you? You be the judge. |
| John | As for us, we cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard. |
| Annas | You have been warned. If we hear any more of this, we will not hesitate to bring the full force of the law down on you. Captain, let them go! |
| Captain | Yessir. (*Releases the prisoners*) |
| Daniel | (*Running/leaping/jumping down through the audience*) Praise God! I can walk! Hallelujah! (*Peter and John follow him out more sedately. The bench and Captain withdraw in a different direction.)* |