

## Easter 2 / April 24, 2022

### Acts 5:30-31

**“The God of our fathers raised this Jesus, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree. God exalted Him at His right hand as Leader and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”**

The transformation of the disciples after the resurrection of Jesus was nothing short of astounding. You could say they experienced their own spiritual resurrection. On Good Friday they were nowhere to be found. They remained in hiding until Jesus came to them through locked doors on Easter evening and lifted their spirits saying, “Peace be with you.” At first, they didn’t believe the witness of the women who said they had seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. They discounted it as “an idle tale.” They disbelieved the witness of Mary Magdalene, who encountered the risen Lord in the garden. At first, they didn’t believe, but when they believed the Lord had risen, they couldn’t stop talking about what they had seen. As the high priest complained in our lesson this morning, they filled Jerusalem with their teaching about Jesus and how God had exalted Him as “Leader and Saviour to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins.”

One of the greatest witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection is the faith of the disciples and the change that came over them after Jesus rose from the grave. They spoke the gospel of salvation received through faith in Jesus’ name, fearlessly. They wouldn’t stop talking about Jesus, despite imprisonment and the threat of death. The night Jesus was arrested, Peter followed Him to the courtyard of the high priests, where He was taken for trial. Three times Peter had the opportunity to confess Jesus. Three times he fearfully denied any knowledge of Jesus, or acquaintance with Him. In our lesson this morning, Peter stares the high priests down and responds to their threats and demand to stop teaching about Jesus, by saying, “We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging Him on a tree.” Where did that courage come from? It came from knowing that God had raised Jesus from the dead and believing He had given Him as Saviour, to give repentance and forgiveness to all who believe, including you and I.

The gospel is the power of God for eternal salvation to all who believe. The gospel is the word by which God testifies that He raised Jesus, whom He gave as a sacrifice for sin. The gospel is the word that promises that whoever turns to Jesus in repentance, will have forgiveness in time and life in eternity. During the days following Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, the believers in general and the apostles in particular, proclaimed the gospel boldly. Fearlessly, they called people to turn to Jesus for the forgiveness of their sins and healing in their relationship with the heavenly Father. Their words had a powerful effect.

The Holy Spirit brought five thousand to faith on the day of Pentecost, another three thousand a few days later. So many came to faith that Luke stops counting and simply says “And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.” It was as the Lord said to Isaiah, centuries earlier, “The word that goes forth from my mouth will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it.” God’s purpose is to proclaim Jesus, whom He raised from the dead, as Saviour from sin and death. His desire is that those who hear His word would believe in Him and have eternal life in His name.

The apostles spoke boldly in Jesus’ name, Peter in particular. However, it’s important to realize that the power is not the person who speaks, but the word that is spoken. When the religious leaders from Jerusalem asked John the baptizer who he was, he simply said he was a voice crying out in the wilderness. He was a voice. The words were God’s. God’s word was the power. In our lesson, the religious authorities that put Jesus to death, attempted to destroy the witness of the church, by having its leadership arrested and silenced. All of the apostles were imprisoned. They were released by an angel, not because they were the only ones qualified or equipped to preach the word. They were released from their chains and told to go and proclaim “all the words of this life,” to show that God’s word is the power of faith and salvation. They were released in a miraculous way to testify that His word will not be chained. His word will always accomplish His purpose of proclaiming Jesus as Saviour. His word will always achieve His desire of giving faith to those who listen and life to those who believe.

The apostles were central to the spread of the gospel and the growth of the church in the first century. Their teaching is the foundation upon which the church is built. Jesus trained them for that purpose. As St. Paul said the church is built on the foundation of the prophets and apostles. But of course, Christ Jesus crucified for our sins and raised for our justification, is the chief cornerstone. Because Christ is the cornerstone, the church grew and the gospel spread, despite the imprisonments and deaths of the apostles. The arrest, imprisonment and beating of the apostles was the first of many persecutions of the leadership of the church. The result was not the death of

the church but the continued growth of the church. The foundation upon which the church is built is the teaching of Jesus as Lord.

The imprisonment and deaths of the leaders of the church, emboldened the church to continue to proclaim the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus' name. The first believer to shed his blood and lay down his life for the gospel, was Stephen. A persecution broke out after his death. The leadership remained intact, but the church in Jerusalem was largely dispersed, as the first wave of converts returned to their home countries. The membership count in Jerusalem went down, but the church continued to grow. The church grew, because the dispersed believers told others the good news that God raised Jesus and exalted Him as His right hand to give repentance and forgiveness to all who believed.

It is important for us to listen to the words spoken by the apostles. It is also important to add our voices in proclaiming the gospel of salvation through faith in Jesus' name, in our daily interactions with others. Big flashy events, such as Peter preaching at Pentecost, attract people's attention and linger in the memory. But many more people heard the gospel from the five thousand who went and told others about Jesus.

The great churches of the New Testament era largely came into being through the evangelism of anonymous believers, who heard the gospel and then told their families, friends, neighbours and coworkers. Peter and Paul are honoured as the apostles who founded the church in Rome. But they really are honorary titles, because the church existed in Rome decades before Peter visited or Paul wrote his letter. The power is not the personality of the speaker. The power is the word. The word is the good news that God has raised Jesus, exalted Him to His right hand that repentance and forgiveness of sins would be proclaimed in His name. God wants all of us to believe the word of the gospel and have life in Jesus' name. God wants us to share the words of life with others.

Easter is a season to consider the significance of Jesus' resurrection and effect it has on our lives in time as well as in eternity. The effect of Jesus' resurrection is that in eternity we will rise in bodies like His body; perfect in every way, free of sin in every part. We cannot begin to imagine the life we will receive in eternity through Jesus' resurrection. As St. Paul said echoing Isaiah, "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has perceived the things God has prepared for those who love Him."

Easter is a season to consider the effect Jesus' resurrection has on our lives in time. Jesus' resurrection encourages our faith in dark and trouble times. Jesus' resurrection gives us hope and comfort as we grieve the deaths of fellow believers. Jesus' resurrection emboldens us to join the witness of the apostles and the church throughout the ages and share the good news of salvation through faith in His name. God bless us to believe and to share the good news of Easter that God has exalted Jesus at His right hand as Saviour and gives repentance, forgiveness of sins and eternal life for all to receive. In Jesus' Name. Amen