

## Acts 4:32-35 & John 20:19-31 - "The Power of the Resurrection"

Pr. Kurt A. VanFossan - Easter 2B 2024

Our gospel reading began by speaking of some of Jesus' disciples before they knew of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. We're told that they were meeting behind locked doors "*for fear of the Jews,*" at least those who had been successful in seeing to it that Jesus was crucified. Apparently they were afraid that the same thing could happen to them as followers of Jesus. When, however, "*Jesus came and stood among them and said to them, 'Peace be with you,'*" all this changed, but not right away.

At first Jesus' disciples were in shock. While they had seen Jesus raise other people, like Lazarus, from the dead, how could He raise Himself from the dead if He was dead. But, as they say, "The proofs in the pudding." As hard as it was to believe, Jesus, who was dead, was now standing there before them bearing the marks of His crucifixion.

But Jesus' resurrection and what it meant for their own lives would take awhile to sink in. That's why, "*Eight days later,*" the disciples were still meeting behind locked doors. But by the time of our reading from Acts, that was no longer the case. The reading from Acts speaks of a time after Jesus' resurrection, ascension, and the work of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. After all these major events, not only had the church in Jerusalem grown well into the thousands, but in public places and "*with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord,*" to the amazement of especially the religious leaders.

A little later in Acts we're told why the religious leaders were so amazed at these turn of events. One of the Pharisees in their council reminded them of others in the past like Jesus, who "*claimed to be somebody.*" These men had also gathered a number of followers, like Jesus. But after these men were killed, "*all who followed [them] were dispersed and came to nothing*" (Acts 5:36).

What the religious leaders were not counting on, however, was Jesus' resurrection from the dead. That makes all the difference. And even though we believe in Jesus' resurrection, we are still growing in our appreciation of it's significance in our daily lives. That's why it's important for us to be reminded of Jesus' death and resurrection, and meditate on it, as often as possible so that the Lord can help us to better appreciate what it means for us.

Jesus' resurrection reminds me of an incident that I was told about when I lived in England. It happened in 1815, at the end of the Napoleonic wars. The British army, led by the Duke of Wellington, was fighting against the French army, led by Napoleon. The people in Britain at that time depended on a system of signals using handheld flags to learn how the fight was going.

One foggy day in London, a signal was given from the top of Winchester Cathedral which said, "Wellington defeated." This terrible news began to spread throughout London, resulting in great despair among all who heard it. But then, after the fog lifted, the remainder of the message could be seen. The complete message read, "Wellington defeated the enemy!" That's a big difference!

The same is true is true with Jesus. On the Friday of Jesus' death the message read, "Jesus defeated," resulting in great despair among Jesus' disciples. But when the fog lifted on Easter Sunday, the full message read, "Jesus defeated the enemy!" That's the message of Jesus' resurrection, which gives us reason to

celebrate every day our our lives as we travel through this life on our way to paradise, now made possible through Jesus death and resurrection.

In relation to Jesus defeating the enemy, let me give you something else to think about. I was reminded in a devotion recently about how the OT priests and their families ate part of the sin offerings that were offered on behalf of the people. The sins of the people were placed upon the animal that was to be sacrificed, like a lamb without blemish. The lamb in effect absorbed the sins of the people, including the punishment the people deserved because of their sins, which was death. Then, after the lamb was sacrificed, the priests and their families ate or absorbed the lamb that had paid for their sins, thus making them holy (Leviticus 6:25-27; 22:1-16).

All of this points ahead to what would ultimately happen through the Son of God, who became flesh in Jesus Christ to absorb our sins, as well as the punishment we deserve because of our sins. You could say that He ate our sins and death through His death. Then He descended to the outhouse of hell to deposit our sins and death there. He, then, rose from the dead, free from our sins and death, to give us, the family members of our great High Priest, Jesus Christ — the priesthood of all believers (1 Peter 2:9)—His crucified and risen body and blood through His Word, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper to eat and absorb into our lives, making us holy—free from our sins, death, and the devil (all of which will remain forever in the outhouse of hell), and fit for eternal life in paradise.

The more the early church grew in their appreciation of this good news, the more they *“devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and prayers”* (Acts 2:42), which is what we're doing now in the Divine Service. The more they also lived their lives in this world as if *“the things that belonged to [them were not their own], ... As many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need.”*

This does not mean that the early Christians were Communists, Marxists, or even Socialists. The difference is that Communism or Socialism is a government controlled and forced redistribution of a person's wealth against their will. In our text, however, it's obvious that the selling and distributing that took place among God's people was completely voluntary, *“as any had need.”*

Over the past ten years as your pastor, I've seen the same thing happening here at Redeemer when it comes to your giving to things like our Synod's disaster relief fund, supporting foreign mission work, and especially in supporting not only the continued operation of this congregation, but also the operation of Tiny Treasures Preschool and Resurrection Lutheran School, where God's Word is boldly proclaimed to our members, to the people of our community, and beyond.

All glory be to God, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

[Children's Sermon] Have you ever thought of yourself as a bell? When you were born, you were a sinner like me and everyone else. Therefore, we could not make any music for the Lord. We were all like this bell [ring bell with no clapper].

That's why God's Son became a man in Jesus Christ, so that He could set us free from our sins and death, through His death and resurrection, and give us faith in this good news. Once we have faith in Jesus Christ as our Savior, God can use us to make music for the Lord (like this bell), by telling others about Jesus throughout the week, and especially when God brings us together with other believers in Jesus Christ (like He has today), making us like these bells, as we together sing about all that God has done for us.