

## Hear These Words

*Acts 2:22-39 ~ March 26, 2017 ~ Heritage Lutheran Church*

We have all watched enough police shows on television to know that, as a fundamental aspect of their work, law enforcement personnel will display their badge on official business. Have you ever thought about why they do that? By displaying their badges, officers of the law demonstrate that they have the authority for what they say and do. When Joe Citizen says that we should or shouldn't do something, it is a matter of opinion. However, when the police display their badges and start telling us what to do, it is something we need to obey. The sign of authority makes all the difference.

This is exactly what Peter is getting at in today's text from Acts when he says,

***Men of Israel, hear these words: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—***

"Mighty works, wonders, and signs were Jesus' badge of authority. This is not some kind of theological interpretation of Jesus' divine power. No, everyone in Israel knew good and well that the true Messiah would make himself known by displays of divine power just like what Jesus had done. It was as clear to the faithful Jew as an FBI Agent showing his badge is to us. Remember Nicodemus? He was a member of the Sanhedrin, which was a kind of religious congress ruling in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus. He knew the scriptures. He knew what sign of authority the Messiah would display. Even though he came to Jesus by night his words verify this understanding clearly,

***Rabbi, we know that you are a teacher come from God, for no one can do these signs that you do unless God is with him.***

Members of the Sanhedrin itself knew the truth about Jesus' identity and his authority. But they decided to kill him anyway. This is very troubling. How can those who worship the one true God be so blind as to want to ambush and assassinate someone who actually has messianic authority? It was clear to everyone who took the time to look, that Jesus is the Messiah promised by Scripture. That was the power behind Peter's sermon. That was why he demanded to those gathered on that first Christian Pentecost, "Hear these words..."

In his Pentecost sermon, Peter claimed that Jesus had properly and clearly displayed his credentials as the true Messiah. Many of those listening to Peter on that day knew the truth of this claim first hand. Everyone was more than aware that Peter's words were clearly true. But they thought just being in the crowd at Passover would excuse them. They thought that it was a shame that Jesus had died, but what could they do about it? Peter's sermon addresses them as Israelites to remind them of their sacred birthright as God's Chosen people. He declares that they knew darn good and well that Jesus properly displayed his credentials through works of power to identify him as the promised messiah. And then he lowers the boom. St Peter said,

***this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men.***

This is one of the most terrifying sentences in all of Scripture. It states plainly that God knew the Jews would reject their messiah. God knew that even though Jesus clearly showed them who he was, they would reject him and seek to kill him. But in spite of his foreknowledge, God still sent Jesus. God sent Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel. God sent Jesus to be the Messiah of Israel who died on the Cross. And not one person standing within earshot of Peter on Pentecost was blameless. Not one person in the world who ever lived or who will ever live is blameless before Peter's razor edged words. We are all guilty, you and I. As the 2nd verse of the hymn, Ah Holy Jesus, says so clearly:

***Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?***

***Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee.***

***'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee; I crucified thee.***

Peter's words not only cut the men of Israel to the heart, but they do the same to us when we listen carefully. We are Christians, yes. We are for Christ, yes. We put our faith in Jesus, Yes. But still we sin every day and in so many ways we fall short of the glory of God. Please understand, this is just a statement of the truth. It is not a condemnation or a prescription for living perfect human lives. Scripture is very clear, Works of the Law will never save anyone. But we need to know the reason why, works of the Law will never save us. It is because we are completely incapable of doing them. We are bound to sin. It is that bondage to sin, the addiction to sin causes us to stand right beside those men of Israel who first heard Peter's words. It is why we are just as guilty as they are for the crucifixion of Jesus Christ.

But the terror over guilt about the crucifixion is minimal beside the fear filled reality of the resurrection of Jesus Christ. That was Peter's trump card. That was the feature of his sermon designed to blow away the opposition. As Peter puts it:

***God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it.***

You know how scary it is when in a thriller movie someone who seems to be dead suddenly comes back to life. Most of the time, it is someone who is bad; someone who we want the plot of the story to kill. It was like that for many who were listening to Peter. Think about how they must have experienced the events at Passover that year. Many had been for Jesus on Palm Sunday, they had wanted him to be King. They had voted for him with their palm branches and their hosannas. But they had expected him to take control of the armies and to use his miraculous powers to cast out the Romans. They wanted him to restore Israel to its former independent glory. But instead of attacking the Romans, Jesus had attacked the priests and driven them out of the temple. The crowds' opinion began to shift in their disappointment. How could he be the messiah, even with all the proofs and works of power, if he did not demonstrate his willingness to do what everyone thought the messiah should do? In the end the crowd went along with the Sanhedrin's conviction that Jesus had to die. Everyone was sure that killing Jesus would put an end to this troublesome uproar and that they could return to normal after he was dead and gone. Well he was dead, but he was not gone.

Now if we are really honest with ourselves we all have moments when we agree with the crowds in Jerusalem. We never think to ourselves that we wish Jesus had just stayed dead. But all of us find times when our Christianity is not convenient. There are so many awkward questions about resurrection. Sometimes it seems like it would be easier to follow Jesus as Martyr who just gave his life in a great cause. But, that is not the case. Jesus is truly human, born of the Virgin Mary, but he is also truly divine, Son of the Father from eternity. Because of his humanity Jesus was capable of dying, but only as an act of his will. But nothing in the universe could keep him dead. In fact three days was the time limit for how long he could be dead. As Peter points out,

***King David foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses.***

The words Peter commanded those first century Israelites to hear exploded like a bombshell in Jerusalem. Jesus, the very Jesus the people listening to Peter had met and seen crucified, was alive again. Not only had he demonstrated that he was the true messiah, but he revealed that he was true God. These words changed the very nature of the universe. Life is not about striving inside political and social reality. Life is about eternity with God. Faith in Jesus Christ is the way into that life for everyone.

On the day that Peter called to his fellow Israelites to "hear these words," Jesus poured out the Holy Spirit on all flesh. Those listening to Peter were "***cut to the heart.***" They saw the truth. In anguish filled with joy and hope they asked, "***Brothers, what shall we do?***" To this vital question Peter spoke the words of life. My dear friends, hear these words!

***Repent and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit...***

Hear these words!

***...you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and for your children and for all who are far off, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to himself.***

Faith in Jesus is the lynch pin in this new reality. Jesus has never stopped pouring out his Spirit since that day. Down through time, the Holy Spirit has come to age after age of those who put their faith in the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ. Generation upon generation of Christians have seen the depth of their sin in the comprehensive compassion of Christ. This is the nature of true repentance. It is not a work of sorrow, breast beating, or self deprecation. It is the sudden massive realization of what it has cost God through Jesus to forgive us and justify us into the Kingdom of God. True repentance is being cut to the heart. But that is only the beginning of the story.

In every age Baptism unites faith and promise through the coming of the Holy Spirit who dwells inside the life and being of every Christian. This same Holy Spirit is God's great gift to you. His purpose is to heal the cutting of your heart and to bring you a new life in God. That new life is at work in you at this very moment. And as you hear these words it stirs in you, calling you to awaken from the dark sleep of this world and to walk this day in the glorious light of God. This new life that the Holy Spirit is creating in you is real. It is beautiful, filled with hope, joy, and peace. It calls you to take each step by

faith, confident in your Father's good will and certain of Jesus' authority to rule in His Kingdom. Today is the beginning of your eternity with God.

While you live in this life he has valuable work for you to do. But this work is the work of your new life in Christ. It is yours by the love of God in the Holy Spirit. Do not struggle to please God. God has chosen you in Love. He has made you a new person. He has asked you to trust him. He is more deeply pleased with you than you will ever know. Why else would he have sent his son to die for you? Now, live in him. Be the new person he has created you to be. Walk by the power of the Holy Spirit alive in you. Hear these words!

The cross is full. The tomb is empty. Jesus is alive and leading us out to go, make, baptize and teach disciples. Let us take up our cross and follow him.