

*The Second Sunday of Easter*

April 7, 2013

Amazing Grace Lutheran Church – Pastor Chip Wilke

Acts 5:12, 17-32 – Easter 2

*The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade...Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin--the full assembly of the elders of Israel--and sent to the jail for the apostles. But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."*

A woman was found guilty of murdering her husband and was sentenced to life in prison. From the first day she entered jail she thought about how she might escape. She befriended an elderly groundskeeper who also took care of the cemetery just outside the prison. This man was going blind and in order to keep his sight needed an eye surgery he could not afford. This woman promised that if he would help her escape she would pay for his surgery. He agreed. Their plan was the next time someone in the prison died she would climb into the coffin with the dead body. Then the coffin would be taken to the cemetery and laid in the ground and after everyone was gone the groundskeeper would dig through the dirt open the coffin and let her out.

The day came when she heard someone had died and as planned, when no one was watching, the woman got into the coffin with the dead body. The coffin was taken out of the prison to the cemetery and then was put into the ground. Now she waited for her rescue. But no one came and as time went by she began to get nervous as she waited in this buried coffin. In panic she reached for a match she had in her pocket and lit it.

Then she saw the face of the dead person with whom she was buried. It was the groundskeeper. Her only hope of rescue was dead & buried with her.

The truth is that you, I, and all people in this world only have one hope of being rescued as well. There is only one Man who could save us from a prison and a pit of death even worse. That man is Jesus. He too died and was buried, but He rose from the dead. Our Jesus, our Rescuer, lives. He has risen indeed. This truth is too big to only celebrate one Sunday, so we celebrate the resurrection of Jesus every Sunday! We celebrate for we now have life – life with God. We celebrate because our sins are paid for – every single one of them. We celebrate the good news that because Jesus lives we too will live forever. Not only does Jesus' resurrection give us reason to celebrate every week, but it now gives our lives purpose every day. We have work to do – valuable, meaningful work. We are Jesus' witnesses in this world. We are able to tell others what we have now seen and heard. My prayer today is that this good news of God's Word motivates us to: **Tell everyone all about the life Jesus' resurrection gives us.**

It was a good time, actually an awesome time, to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. On Pentecost 3000 people were added to the number of believers through baptism and the Word. Soon that number grew to over 5000. We are told the believers would get together regularly at a place most likely on the side of the temple called "*Solomon's Colonnade*" or as it could be translated "*Solomon's porch.*" Here the apostles' "*performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people.*" Those signs and wonders clearly marked them as apostles sent out directly by Jesus. But the apostles did more than perform miracles – they told people about Jesus – daily. We are told that more and more men and women believed the Lord and were added to their number. Yes the resurrection of their Lord set them on fire to spread the Word.

But not everyone was happy with what was going on. "*Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy.*" We are told some of the highest ranking Jews were filled with jealousy or perhaps even a better translation of the word is they were extremely angry. They did not like what was going on and since they were the ones who condemned Jesus to death and worked so hard to put a stop to the people following Jesus we can understand why. So they arrest the apostles and put them in the public jail. They don't want to hear anyone talking about Jesus anymore. They had already given Peter and John strict orders not to speak at all the name of Jesus. But as Peter and John told them before they could not help speaking about the things they had heard and seen. So now these authorities decide they need to take matters into their own hands to silence Jesus' disciples.

But soon we see they could not silence these apostles anymore than they were able to keep the lid on Jesus' empty tomb! The angel of the Lord opens the doors of the jail and lets them out. And listen carefully to what the angel tells them to do. He doesn't say: "*Get out of here as quick as you can and hide*" or "*from now on you are going to have to be much more careful about what you say and to whom you tell the message.*" He doesn't send them home to come back another day. He says: "*Go, stand in the temple courts and tell the people the full message of this new life.*" The angel sends them right back into the public eye and back with the very same message they had been proclaiming. In fact, the angel literally says to speak all the words of life. Tell them everything God has done through Jesus. Proclaim all of God's Word. Don't hold back

anything! Do not keep silent! Keep telling everyone all about the life Jesus' resurrection gives us.

In Florence Alabama eighteen dogs were ushered into a gas chamber into which they pumped carbon dioxide. As officials returned and opened the door, out came this one dog. Reports say **“he walked out wagging his tail. He was sick but he was alive.”** Following his brush with death, the beagle mix was given the name Daniel, after the Biblical name for obvious reasons. When this story hit the evening news, a flood of requests came in for this miracle dog, which ended up receiving a new life in a home in New Jersey.

The Sanhedrin was in for just as big of a surprise for sure. Remember the Sanhedrin was the highest ruling council in Judea made up of both Pharisees and Sadducees and led by the high priest. The full assembly of this council gathered to take care of this problem. When they were ready they sent for the apostles to be brought in front of them. Imagine their surprise as they hear the guards were still standing watch as the prison door, that jail was still securely locked, but that no one was inside! Imagine the greater surprise still when their prisoners were seen standing right out in the temple courts not just wagging their tails, but teaching the people about Jesus! We are not told what the people on the Sanhedrin were thinking but I think I would be asking myself some serious questions. I would be saying to myself *“not again.”* My mind would be on a tomb they also had securely closed and guarded.

Whether any of the men on the Sanhedrin had some of these thoughts or not we aren't told, but they are more careful in their dealing with these apostles now. They still ask them to appear before them but do not use force fearing the crowd of people might actually turn on them – even stone them. They keep the course with their futile attempts to silence the news of Jesus' resurrection. The high priest says ***“We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood.”*** Here we get to the heart and core of what made these enemies of the Church so angry. They were guilty and the message of Jesus crucified and risen was a constant reminder. They did put Jesus to death by their sinful actions. They falsely accused Jesus and handed over innocent blood. Now they couldn't even stand to hear the name Jesus. If you noticed they don't even say it –they refer to this name and call Jesus “this man.” They don't want to hear Jesus again.

But the disciples had orders from a much higher authority than even the Sanhedrin. They had orders from the One who can do more than destroy the body. They had orders from the One who is able to destroy both body and soul in hell. The angel sent to free them just reinforced those orders. So ***“Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead--whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”*** They could not obey their leaders in this case because they told them to do something that went directly against God's command. They would not stop talking. They would not be quiet. They would keep telling everything the news about Jesus' death and resurrection. For repentance and forgiveness – life itself was at stake!

There are a couple of things for us to go home with today. First of all, say a little prayer of thanksgiving sometime today that we live in a country where we are able to teach and preach God's Word without fear. Thank God for this freedom and right and ask for this privilege to continue to that we don't have to one day tell our government we must obey God rather than men. Secondly, I pray we remember that it was not just the Sanhedrin and the high priest Caiaphas who were guilty of killing Jesus by hanging Him on a tree. Our sins did that too. Jesus' blood was shed on the cross to cover our guilt. But as Peter reminds us God raised Jesus from the dead and exalted Him to His own right hand so that the Savior might give repentance and forgiveness of sins. In Jesus, we have forgiveness and life, full life. That's what the apostles wanted this council and all people to know.

So do we, don't we? Yes, it is still a great time, actually an awesome time to be a disciple of Jesus Christ. Jesus' resurrection still means the same things for us that it did for the apostles. It means a life filled with joy and peace and forgiveness and hope. It means our lives now have true value and meaning. It means we understand why we are here and where we are going. Tell everyone all about this life. We may never get to see the results this early Church did as more men and women every day were added to their number. But we can sure try, can't we? How awesome would it be to make it our goal to have our church as full as it was last week every Sunday? I would love to hear one day some enemy make the same accusation against Amazing Grace – you have filled this city “*with your teaching.*” Yes, tell everyone that our Rescuer, our Jesus, lives. Tell them all that it means – for this is why God has given us His Word – that they too might believe that Jesus is the Christ and that by believing in Him others too might have life in His name. Amen.