

Sermon on Acts 3:11-20 – 2nd Weekend of Easter
St. Paul's Lutheran – New Ulm, MN – Pastor N. Scharf

You've probably had moments like me when you've walked away from a conversation or argument with a co-worker, friend, or opponent and had the word you had been looking for or the facts you couldn't seem to think of minutes before suddenly come to you. You think, "Oh, I should have said this!" But it's too late.

I can't imagine anyone from Holy Week having more regrets about what he said or didn't say than the disciple Peter. In shame and fear he hid even after he heard Jesus rose from the grave. Today we see him proclaim Christ boldly in the temple courts unafraid. What changed? Jesus rose from the grave and appeared to his disciples. Jesus opened their minds to understand from Scripture all that he did. Jesus forgave Peter and gave him the opportunity to speak - not defensively with fear and terror to a servant girl in a courtyard, nor in silent forceful anger and adrenaline to a group of soldiers in a garden, nor with a self-centered pride before his fellow disciples trusting in his own power. God gave him the opportunity to speak to all what he had seen: Jesus the resurrected Lord of all and what it means for them and you. What change it brings!

Why does this surprise you? We are witnesses of this.

"While the man held on to Peter and John, all the people were astonished and came running to them in the place called Solomon's Colonnade. When Peter saw this, he said to them, "Fellow Israelites, why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk? The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you. You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this. By faith in the name of Jesus, this man whom you see and know was made strong. It is Jesus' name and the faith that comes through him that has completely healed him, as you can all see. "Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send Messiah, who has been appointed for you – even Jesus."

Peter didn't hide anymore. He had seen Jesus. Peter and John had walked into the temple as they had been doing every day since Pentecost to boldly teach the people about Jesus Christ crucified and risen. A beggar was there outside the temple gate who had been lame since birth. Peter said, "Look at us...silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk." That man walked with them into the temple courts, walking, jumping, and praising God. He wouldn't let go of Peter and John, and all the people came to them. Peter took the opportunity God gave him. He asks the crowd, "Why does this surprise you?"

We know miracles happen every day – physical and spiritual. A baby is conceived, grows in the womb of its mother and is delivered and starts to breathe on its own. A baby or adult is baptized in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit and washed clean of their sin, made something different than they were before. These are common miracles. The not so common we marvel at – a person's cancer disappears. There is no way someone should have walked away from an accident, but they did. Anonymous helpers show up to rescue someone and then no one remembers seeing them except the one rescued. God gifted the early church with even more obvious miracles which believers performed. He used these to open their eyes, ears and hearts to hear the Gospel.

"Why does this surprise you? Why do you stare at us as if by our own power or godliness we had made this man walk?" Peter, who at one time was prideful, now boldly proclaims that none of this was from him. God did this to lead them away from their own sins and blindness so that they see Jesus is truly God and the Savior they so desperately need.

Preaching the law. We don't delight in preaching the law to condemn you. Whether we use "we" or "you" we include ourselves because we too are sinners. Peter said, "Men, Israelites." In other places he says, "fellow Israelites." This is one sinner to another. Peter was once badly mistaken, but Jesus led him out. Jesus sent Peter to lead them out of their sin. They first need to see how sinful they are, and we do too. We need to be confronted about sins we've become all too comfortable with in our lives, sins that erode our faith and seek to kick out the foundation of Christ until we think we no longer need him, the only help that will save us. We need to be led out of our blindness.

"The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, the God of our fathers, has glorified his servant Jesus. You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go. You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you." "You killed the author of life..." Wait, what? You can imagine the silence and the horror. What they had put out of their minds now came confronting them. Like a skeleton in the closet that leaps out and grabs them, Peter publicly confronts them about what they did to their God. Jesus, the Son of God, came into this world for them, and they *"handed him over to be killed,"* and they *"disowned him before Pilate."* Fact.

Peter knew what they did because it was his story as well. Peter denied Jesus before the people in that courtyard and a servant girl who questioned him. He disowned Jesus. The undeserved grace and freedom given to Barabbas, the murderer, was outdone by the grace and freedom Jesus gave to Peter, the denier. When Jesus rose from the grave he told the women to give a message to his disciples, "and to Peter" (Mark 16:7). Peter knew that sin and shame and regret that he was leading his fellow Jews to realize was theirs as well. *"You killed the author of life."* And he needed to lead them to see God's heart and forgiveness even for sinners, sinners like Peter the denier, and his fellow Jews the murderers of the Messiah. That's what Jesus did for him. Fact.

"You killed the author of life, but God raised him from the dead. We are witnesses of this." Jesus had forgiven him. Jesus had graced him by giving him the Holy Spirit. Jesus had been raised from the grave body and soul and proved it to Peter. Fact. This Savior was for them as well. Fact. The lame man who had been healed learned of this Savior, and also his power and he walked! Peter points to who gets the credit. *"It is Jesus name."* *"Jesus' name"* is all he is and all he has done. He rose!

"Now, fellow Israelites, I know that you acted in ignorance, as did your leaders. But this is how God fulfilled what he had foretold through all the prophets, saying that his Messiah would suffer. Repent, then, and turn to God, so that your sins may be wiped out, that times of refreshing may come from the Lord." How could they be forgiven? Jesus suffered for them and their damnable sins. This is why he came! Not only did Jesus call this ahead of time, *"all the prophets"* did too in the Scriptures. Read them. They show you and prove to you Jesus, your Savior, lived for you perfectly, then died innocently bearing your sin, guilt and shame, even the sin, guilt and shame of those who handed him over to be crucified and those deniers, even Peter, even you, even me. He paid our debt. It is finished. And he proved it counted by rising from the grave. Peter saw Jesus alive. You can check the replay again and again. We have more than four different angles so you can see he really did die for you. He really did rise. You are forgiven. Death is not the end. You have God's grace and mercy assured. Check Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John!

By God's grace Peter nailed this opportunity and he continued to proclaim Christ in all he did. But maybe this Peter couldn't be the same Peter from weeks before, could it? It was. What had changed? What had changed him? Jesus rose from the grave. Peter witnessed his Savior alive and glorified. It changed him and all he did. Nothing else mattered so much as Jesus. Unafraid now, Peter risked his life each day walking into the temple courts so that he could tell even Jesus' murderers that this gift of grace and forgiveness and eternal life was for them too in Jesus, the risen Lord. He didn't want them to stay in ignorance and darkness. He preached repentance for the forgiveness of sins as Jesus did. Peter shined the light of the Gospel into their lives so God could change them from darkness to the light of God's love and forgiveness, into *"times of refreshing"* not only now in God's forgiveness in Christ, but at home in heaven experienced fully at Jesus' return on the last day.

By his resurrection Jesus has changed everything and you. He has forgiven your sin in Jesus Christ. He will help you to change where change is needed and live for him. Why? Because we don't have to be afraid of anything. Our risen Lord lives. Fact. So live for him now and eternally. What a change Jesus' resurrection brings! ***Why are you surprised at this? We are witnesses of this.*** Live for your risen Lord. Amen.