

Sermon for Holy Trinity Sunday

Date: May 27, 2018

Location: St. John's Lutheran Church, Austin, MN

Old Testament: Isaiah 6:1-8

Epistle Reading: Acts 2:14a, 22-36

Gospel Reading: John 3:1-17

Sermon Text: Acts 2:14a, 22-36

Sermon Title: Who Are you Going to Trust?

Introit: Psalm 16:8–11; Antiphon: Liturgical Text

Hymns:

LSB 718 – Jesus, Lead thou On

LSB 719 – I Leave All Things to God's Direction

LSB 729 – I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus

Liturgy:

Divine Service I, p. 151



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Text: Acts 2:14a, 22-36

Peter stood up with the eleven apostles. In a loud voice he said to them,

“Men of Israel, listen to what I say: Jesus from Nazareth was a man whom God brought to your attention. You know that through this man God worked miracles, did amazing things, and gave signs. By using men who don’t acknowledge Moses’ Teachings, you crucified Jesus, who was given over to death by a plan that God had determined in advance. God brought him from death back to life and destroyed the pains of death, because death had no power to hold him.

This is what David meant when he said about Jesus: ‘I always see the Lord in front of me. I cannot be moved because he is by my side. That is why my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices. My body also rests securely because you do not abandon my soul to the grave or allow your holy one to decay. You make the path of life known to me. In your presence there is complete joy.’

Brothers, I can tell you confidently that our ancestor David died and was buried and that his tomb is here to this day. David was a prophet and knew that God had promised with an oath that he would place one of David’s descendants on his throne. David knew that the Messiah would come back to life, and he spoke about that before it ever happened. He said that the Messiah wouldn’t be left in the grave and that his body wouldn’t decay. God brought Jesus back to life. We are all witnesses to that. Jesus was given the honored position—the one next to the Father on the heavenly throne. Jesus has received and has poured out the Holy Spirit as the Father had promised, and this is what you’re seeing and hearing. David didn’t go up to heaven, but he said, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, “Take the honored position—the one next to God the Father on the heavenly throne until I put your enemies under your control.’

All the people of Israel should know beyond a doubt that God made Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ.

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May the grace of a Holy Triune God surround you all the days of your life.
Amen.

I suppose two of the greatest questions in life are, “Who do you believe?” and “Who do you trust?” These days if you turn on your television in the middle of the day you will find that courtroom TV is all over the place. There’s Judge Hatchett, Judge Judy, Judge Mathes, The People’s Court, Texas Justice, Hot Bench, and several others.

There is a common theme to these shows. Two people come in, stand before the judge, and tell their stories. Theoretically those stories, covering the same set of facts, should match. They never do. They contradict each other from beginning to end. The judge seems to be able to figure things out right away but we are often left pretty much confused. We wonder, “Who can I believe? Who can I trust?” We make our judgments based on such irrational things like, “I don’t like the way she smiles,” or “He’s got two earrings in each ear, so I think he’s lying.” Then, we turn the channel being grateful that we don’t have to decide whether one, or both of the litigants are lying. We can turn the channel because we’re spectators in the whole thing. We’re not participants.

Who do you trust? Who do you believe? Think about it, aren’t the things which we say we know often really just things we believe? If we trust the person who states the facts we will believe his facts. If we don’t trust that person we will reject what he says. Who do you believe? In whom can you place your trust? The answers to these questions really are important.

When we are participants and not spectators the answer to those questions becomes more important. That is especially true when the answer applies to eternity. Let me read to you a sentence that is about 20 centuries old. It was first spoken by one of Jesus’ disciples, a fellow named Peter. Peter said:

“God has raised this Jesus to life and we are all witnesses of the fact.¹”

Jesus had been born in the tiny town of Bethlehem. At the age of 30 He began a ministry which was a most exceptional thing because Jesus claimed to

1 Acts 2:32

be “the Son of God.” During Jesus’ years of ministry He gave sight to the blind; the lame walked; He healed people of diseases; He fed thousands with a few loaves and fishes, and even brought the dead back to life.

Yet this Jesus, to whom Peter was referring, did more than walk around and heal people. Jesus told people to love one another. He instructed them to care about people, especially to those who didn’t deserve it. So powerful were His words that even those who hated Him had to admit that He spoke with authority.² So gentle were His teachings that even today skeptics have to admit that His words, if followed, would do much to make the world a better place.

Like I said Jesus was someone special. He was unique in the pages of history. He did more than perform healings and speak new teachings. He was more than a physician or an instructor. Born true man, Jesus was also the Son of God. Fulfilling every prophet’s predictions. Jesus spent His entire life living and sacrificing Himself for this messed up world.

Without the smallest stumble or slip He resisted the temptations which have tripped up every one of us. He successfully said, “No” to the devil when the rest of us have said “Yes”³ over and over again. He lived without a heavenly home⁴ so that we could have an eternal home. He loved those who were unlovable. He reached out to those who slapped Him away. He carried the sins which have burdened and broken us.

You might think that the world would have welcomed such an individual. You might think that, but you would be wrong. You might like to believe that those who met Jesus would appreciate Him. You might like to think that, but you’d be wrong. You might guess that the people who came into contact with Him would recognize His greatness, His goodness, His graciousness, His Godliness. You might like to think that, but you’d be wrong.

For all that He did for humanity Jesus was betrayed by a friend, beaten and condemned by His Church, deserted by His government, and tortured to death on a cross. On a skull-shaped hill outside the walls of Jerusalem Jesus died.

² Mark 1:21-28

³ Matthew 4:8-10

⁴ Matthew 8:20

There was no mistake about it Jesus absolutely, completely, totally, beyond any shadow of a doubt, died. Having had His back torn to ribbons by a Roman whip; His head crowned with thorns; His face bloodied and beaten, Jesus was nailed to a cross and He died. To make sure of His demise the soldiers, who kept watch during His last hours, put a spear through His heart.

That should have been the end of Jesus of Nazareth, but it wasn't. Do you remember what Peter said, "God has raised this Jesus to life"? Such a simple sentence. Yet in that sentence is the plan of God, the power of God, the purpose of God, which says that there is hope for every sinful human being. Every one of us who comes to Jesus with a repentant heart will be forgiven and saved. Jesus has taken our place under the Law and willingly received the punishment which we deserved.

Now, because He has risen from the dead, we have a changed life, a changed legacy to leave our families, and a changed eternity. Heaven replaces Hell. The companionship of the Christ comes to those living in loneliness. The joy of Jesus comes to the sad and sorrowful. Sins are swept away and forgiveness is found in the Savior. God has raised Jesus to life.

It's unbelievable! Peter's statement really is unbelievable. It goes against the very laws of nature. It goes against common sense. People don't die for others, especially for those who hate them. People don't rise from the dead. Once you're dead, you're dead.

Yet Peter says:

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Which takes me back to our original questions, "Who do you trust?" "Who do you believe?" These are not some insignificant, irrelevant, and inconsequential questions. If Peter is right all who believe in Jesus as their Savior will be saved from eternal death. If Peter is wrong he is a liar and those who believe what he says are misled.

Do you trust Peter? Do you believe what he is saying? With all the religions in the world I wouldn't be surprised if you're skeptical. With the Christian

religion claiming to be the only way to Heaven I wouldn't be surprised if you have doubts. It would be perfectly normal for you to ask, "How can I know? "How can I be sure?" With eternity hanging in the balance Peter's words demand an investigation. So investigate. Check it out. Let's look at the facts.

Peter says he and the others are witnesses. What did they witness? They, and many others, witnessed a living Lord after His death. To which you might reply, "I've heard of people who say they have gotten glimpses of Bigfoot, Sasquatch, the Loch Ness monster and aliens from outer space." Well, Peter and the others got more than a glimpse of Jesus. They saw Him. For a length of time they saw Him. A number of times they saw Him. Still there's more to this witness that Peter talks about.

Peter admits that he and the others were, like you, skeptical. They didn't believe it. Not at first. You and I both know that you can't always trust your eyes. The disciples knew that too. That's why, to answer their doubts, they ate a meals with Jesus. Figments of imagination don't eat food. That's what this resurrected Jesus did. The doubting disciples felt Jesus' breathe on them and they touched Him. Let that sink in. They touched Him. That's what Peter means when he says that they were witnesses of a living Jesus.

That's not all. Let me tell you something about the disciples. Up until the moment that the Holy Spirit came to them these disciples didn't get it. That's not an insult to their memory, that's just a fact. The disciples generally thought that Jesus was going to build an earthly empire.⁵ The disciples generally thought that Jesus had come to assist only the Jews. The disciples generally thought that they were going to profit from their investment in following Jesus. They didn't get it.

Jesus had told His disciples that He would be crucified and on the third day He would rise. Were the disciples there to welcome their Savior; to see Him walk out of the tomb? They were not. They didn't get it. When Jesus came out of His grave the disciples were, because of their fears, locked away behind closed doors.

Then, on the day Peter spoke these words. The disciples finally got it. Jesus sent His Spirit on them and they were transformed. No longer did they hide in

5 Acts 1:6

fear, they started to preach with courage. They told the world, just as I'm telling you now, that Jesus has risen from the dead. They told the people, since Jesus has risen from the dead, His sacrifice for you is complete. Since Jesus has risen from the dead, repentant hearts can be forgiven. Since Jesus has risen from the dead, His promises can be trusted and everything He said about listening to our prayers, and being with us, and helping us through hardships can be trusted. **If** Jesus is risen from the dead. That's really the key here, isn't it? The word "if." **If** Jesus is risen from the dead.

"Maybe," you might think to yourself, "these disciples had some agenda that made them say that, or were playing a joke. After all, people have played practical jokes before." To that fair question Peter replies, "We are witnesses of the fact." As you investigate, let me tell you what that means. Peter was a witness and he stayed a witness. When they crucified Peter upside-down he stayed a witness. Every one of the disciples stayed a witness.

According to ancient records, one was speared to death, another was crucified, one was beaten to death, one was skinned alive, another was sawn in half. They all stayed witnesses to what they had seen.

Practical jokers don't die that way. Jesus rose from the dead and He promises to raise up all who have died believing in Him as their Savior. Who will you trust? In whom will you believe? I pray you listen to these witnesses and you believe. I pray you can see, beyond all shadow of doubt, that Jesus is your Lord.

Today God's Holy Spirit calls on you to trust Peter and the other witnesses. Believe in their witness, their testimony. Hear God's Word. Let the Holy Spirit give you faith and forgiveness and hope. Listen to the words of the witnesses. Look for yourself. Look inside Jesus' tomb. There is nobody there. Look and believe. Jesus has arisen. The disciples say it. His enemies have never been able to contradict it. See beyond any shadow of a doubt, a living Lord walks through the doorway of the tomb and grants eternal life to all who believe.

Amen.