

2015_04_12 Resurrection 2
Ascension Lutheran Church, Batavia IL
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The Resurrection of Christ Gives Birth to Something Great

Acts 4:32-35

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Grace to you from God our Father who has called us into the fellowship of his Son, and peace to you from the risen Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

In the name of God's holy Servant, through whom great signs and wonders were done, and in whom we have boldness to approach God and to speak His word, beloved of God,

I bet you are wondering what will happen next. I'm standing here, you are sitting there, and here we are together, wondering what will happen next.

If you were here for our Resurrection Sunday sermon last week, you'll know the answer. It was expressed in the dream of a child. A child who sits down to breakfast with his parents and says: "I had a dream that I went back in time and saw Jesus on the cross. Everyone was sad, but I was happy because I knew what happened next!"

As we watch them take down those limp, lifeless limbs from the cross, we know the sorrow that this brings, for it was our sins that put him there. But we are not consumed by it, because we know what happens next. After three days pass by, we know what to expect. So our faith anticipates the angel words, "Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is risen, just as he said." We know what happens next: He lives.

But do we know what happens next? That is to day, after he is risen – then what? We ask the question again. Now that we have discovered He is risen – we are left again wondering what will happen next? What impact will the resurrection of Jesus have on the world? What impact will the resurrection of Jesus have on his disciples? What impact will the resurrection of Jesus have on us? Here we are together, I'm standing here, you're sitting there, and we are going to find out what will happen next.

And to do so, we open up a new chapter as recorded by the evangelist Luke. The gospel according to Luke does not end with chapter 24; it does not end with Jesus ascending into the clouds – because Luke has more to say. Luke goes on with this second volume to his gospel that we call the Acts of the Apostles. Today we begin a

series of sermons that are drawn from the book of Acts where Luke records the birth of something great:

Acts 4:32–35

³²Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. ³³And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. ³⁴Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, ³⁵and laid *them* at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

This Word of the Lord was spoken for you.

Today we find out what happens next:

The Resurrection of Christ Gives Birth to Something Great

1. Great Power to Witness
2. Great Grace to Share

1. Great Power to Witness

The death of their Lord would bring about something great. Great sorrow and great fear. It would drive them into hiding; doors shut; wondering what evil awaits them next. They saw his limp, lifeless limbs taken down from the cross. Not even their own powerful Lord who had worked great signs and wonders in their own presence – not even God's chosen one could stand against the religious and political powers that were against them. And they could do nothing to stop it; nothing to help him; rather they run from it; they are scattered; they are each looking out for themselves.

This is the fear of death. However it might show itself, they are doing what they need to preserve their lives as long as they can. It is a witness weakened by fear. Their witness to God's promises of a resurrection was muffled behind closed doors. Locked up behind doubts and quivering in a need to see it before they will believe it. "Unless I see with my eyes, handle with my hands, I will not believe."

Like Thomas, we often find ourselves saying "unless." Unless I see it with my eyes and touch it with my hands, I will not believe it. Unless I see with my own eyes that He lives; that He will protect me and strengthen me; unless I see with my own eyes that His word can be trusted, I see no reason to come out from behind closed doors. And so easily, like the disciples, our witness to Christ's resurrection becomes muffled. Muffled

in ongoing worries about popularity; about social acceptance; about conforming to a certain American ideal. A fear of death leaves us hiding from the reality of our sins; locked up behind doubts and shackled to an endless desire to satisfy ourselves with things in this world. And so we say “Unless I see it with my eyes and touch it with my hands, I will not believe it.”

But he does appear; in flesh and blood, eating and drinking, showing them the pierced hands, the scarred side. See; touch; handle me and know that death can hold you no longer. Come out from behind those doors and live in Me. And he says to Thomas, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.”

Jesus’ resurrection gave birth to something great. He sent His Holy Spirit to the disciples and gave birth to something great. A great power to witness.

33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus.

The word for witness in our text is the Greek word “martyr.” With great power they gave witness; that is they were martyrs. As time went on, Christians would use this word martyr to refer to those who died for the faith. Christians like Polycarp who died in the lions den singing a hymn was known as one of the earliest martyrs.

The coming of the Holy Spirit was with power. Power to shake the rafters and open the doors. The reality of Christ’s resurrection unshackled the apostles from their sorrow and fear as it gave birth to something great. It opened the doors of that upper room, so that they would be so bold as to venture out into the public, into the threats against them, into the evil forces that stood against them. Just four chapters into the book of Acts and already Peter and John are arrested and facing the very same religious leaders that condemned Jesus to death. But they are no longer afraid. They are no longer hiding.

And so the resurrection of Jesus makes martyrs out of all of us; witnessing by the way we live our lives that we no longer belong to death. We are redeemed and we belong to the living Lord. This draws us out from behind closed doors to confess our sins, knowing God is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

No more “unless” – for we have looked upon the very eye witness report of the Apostles; how, as John writes, they have “seen him with their eyes, touched him with their hands.” – Their eyes saw him eat, their ears listened to him speak peace, their hands touched his hands and feet. And because of this witness, we have confidence to

live a new life, as living echoes of the Apostles' witness. Showing by the way we live that this world is perishing and all that is in it is dying, but we are living and hoping for the life that is to come. The resurrection gives birth to a great power to witness.

2. Great Grace to Share

And we do it not only by the confession of our faith, but also by the way we handle our stuff. For the resurrection of Christ has given birth to a great grace to share.

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. 33 And with great power the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. 34 Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, 35 and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need.

It's that time of year where many Americans are engaged in late night cram sessions as we try to get in our tax forms on time. Will it be a hand out or a hand it over? Will you be getting a check or writing it? Either way, we are left with a question: to whom does your stuff belong? Does your stuff belong to you or to the government?

Well, the answer Scripture gives is neither. It doesn't belong to you; it doesn't belong to the government. For as Psalm 24 confesses, "The earth is the Lord's, and all its fullness, The world and those who dwell therein."

God's grace is pulsing through your veins. Put your hand to your wrist and feel your pulse. Do you feel that. Now I'd like to teach you a simple prayer. Count with me. With each pulse, say "Thank you Lord." Ready ... "Thank you Lord ... thank you Lord ... thank you Lord ... thank you Lord ..." Do you feel it – it is the fullness of the Lord. The fullness which fills our lungs. The fullness which fills our stomach. The fullness which fills our houses with warmth. The fullness which fills the earth. It all belongs to our Creator – a grace we feel pulsing through our veins.

The resurrection of Christ has given birth to something great. The resurrection of Christ is a restoration of that first creation. It is life where there was otherwise death. The only thing that sustains this fallen creation is the promise of a new creation. All this is sustained because of His grace. And this grace is what has drawn us into the fullness of Christ's body. This grace has redeemed and joined us to His resurrection so that we no

longer look at our material belongings as our own. For the earth is the Lord's and all the fullness. And we belong to the fullness of Christ.

32 Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common (in fellowship).

The word fellowship means "sharing." In the New Testament it takes on a variety of expressions, from sharing a common confession, to sharing the body and blood of Christ in communion, to sharing in suffering – we share all things in common. And this finds its visible fruit and expression also in how we share our material goods. For these are not ours to cling to. Toys, time, tax dollars – whether paying in or shelling out – these things are not ours to begin with. We feel it pulsing through our veins: grace. The earth is the Lords and all the fullness. And this yet another testament to the resurrection of our Lord.

Now how does this sharing show itself in our midst? We do not rely on the welfare system of the church like they used to in the days of the Apostles. We may some day ... who knows? But we do rely on each other. I rely on you. My daily bread comes from your offerings. My salary is supported by your contributions to the gospel ministry. You share in this ministry; a ministry where we have all things in common. So our budget is more than numbers; it is an expression of how we have all things in common.

And on a larger scale we are one with all who are members of the CLC. It is a fellowship of the resurrection. And God has showered great grace upon us all, sustaining us for over 50 years now as a confessionally united synod. Right now we twelve professors who rely on your offerings to continue their ministry; we have a high school and college that train future leaders of our synod; a seminary which trains the pastors that will shepherd our synod; two foreign missionaries with the need for at least two more who are reaching out to mission fields – mission fields where the membership out numbers our own in the CLC more than three-fold, but where the income does not. We have opportunities on every side. And the word fellowship means sharing.

So the resurrection gives birth to something great. A great grace to share. It pulses through our veins as we say "thank you Lord ... thank you Lord ... thank you Lord" with each dollar we put in the offering plate. We too have all things in common and when any of our fellow members or ministry leaders are in need, we let go of what God has given us and say "thank you Lord."

The Resurrection of Christ Gives Birth to A Great Grace to Share.

And that's why I'm standing here; and that's why you're sitting there; because this is what happens next. The next chapter after the resurrection reveals the birth of something great. A church that is united, coming out from behind closed doors in great power to witness boldly to the resurrection; coming together in a great grace which enables us to share all things in common.

Those lifeless, limp limbs are now living. For his body is alive and we see it among us. A living body to which we've been joined. A mouth which witnesses boldly of His resurrection and body parts which works together, sharing all things as one – for we all belong to that body, a risen body which has given birth to something great. Amen.