

INI

St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
April 18, 2021
2nd Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: 1 John 1:1-2:2, Luke 24:36-49

Hymns: 196:1-4; 192:1,5-7; 305:1,4,7; 207:6

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Sermon Text: Acts 4: 8-20

Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: ⁹If we this day are judged for a good deed *done* to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. ¹¹This is the ‘stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.’ ¹²Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

¹³Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus. ¹⁴And seeing the man who had been healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it. ¹⁵But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, ¹⁶saying, “What shall we do to these men? For, indeed, that a notable miracle has been done through them is evident to all who dwell in Jerusalem, and we cannot deny *it*. ¹⁷But so that it spreads no further among the people, let us severely threaten them, that from now on they speak to no man in this name.”

¹⁸So they called them and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus. ¹⁹But Peter and John answered and said

to them, “Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge. ²⁰ For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.” (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

Sanctify us, oh Lord, through Your truth. Your Word is truth.
Amen.

In Christ Jesus, our crucified and risen Savior, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Witnessing the resurrection!

This is a major feature of our Easter observance. We all know about the struggle that Thomas had in accepting the truth that Jesus rose from the dead and was truly alive. Even when others told him that had seen the Lord, Thomas said that he needed to see and touch the Lord before he would believe. In His grace Jesus appeared again to the disciples and called Thomas to see, touch Him, and believe! We know Thomas’ powerful confession, “*My Lord and my God!*”

(John 20:28)

There are other proofs of Jesus’ resurrection and evidence that He is our ever-living Savior. Our text presents such evidence as the Apostles Peter and John prove to be effective witnesses to Jesus’ resurrection.

But what about us? Are we ready to serve as witnesses of Jesus’ resurrection? May the Holy Spirit open our eyes to --

THEME: Witnessing the Power of a Living Savior!

As our living Savior, Jesus possesses -

I. The Power to Save.

The events of our text follow closely after the healing of a lame man at the gates of the temple. The poor beggar was seeking alms from those who came to the temple. While Peter and John had no money to give him, they gave the poor man something far better. When the crowds were astonished at the man’s sudden healing,

Peter glorified Jesus, the same Jesus the Jews had rejected and crucified, for it was Jesus' power that had healed this man. We read Peter's testimony in Acts chapter 3: *"(you) killed the Prince of life, whom God raised from the dead, of which we are witnesses. ¹⁶And His name, through faith in His name, has made this man strong, whom you see and know. Yes, the faith which comes through Him has given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."* (Acts 3:15-16)

That didn't sit well at all with the chief priests and leaders of the Jews. It got Peter and John and perhaps also the healed man arrested and thrown into prison overnight. It didn't sit well because it was evidence that Jesus was not only living, but still powerful, that is, **powerful to save!**

The next morning, Peter and John were brought before an assembly of the most powerful leaders of the Jews. *"When they had set them in the midst, they asked, 'By what power or by what name have you done this?'"* (Acts 4:7)

The Holy Spirit directed Peter's answer:

"Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, 'Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: ⁹If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, ¹⁰let it be known to you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead, by Him this man stands here before you whole. ¹¹This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' ¹²Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved." (Acts 4:8-12)

Peter proclaimed the same message, spoken boldly even to the face of these powerful men, God raised up Jesus whom they had crucified. The One they had rejected, God had been made the chief cornerstone, the cornerstone of the Church, the people of God!

Jesus is powerful to save! Jesus' power to save extends far beyond healing power that restored vigor to a lame man's legs. Jesus is the One, the only One who brings salvation from sin and death.

Again, in our day it is both necessary and important that we emphasize this truth, *“there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”* (v.12) So many false hopes are presented in this world as legitimate ways to eternal life. Even among Christian denominations it is considered insensitive to present Jesus as the **only** way to salvation. That is foolishness that leads to damnation. **Jesus** is powerful to save. **Jesus** is the one who gave Himself as *“an offering and sacrifice to God.”* (Ephesians 5:2) It is as our epistle lesson declared, It is *“the blood of Jesus Christ (God’s) Son (that) cleanses us from all sin.”* (1 John 1:7) *“He Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world.”*

(1 John 2:2)

Jesus is our Risen Savior. Jesus is our ever-living Lord! We are witnesses of His power to save, for we know and believe that we have forgiveness, life, and salvation through faith in His name. It is *“not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us.”* (Titus 3:5)

Witnessing the power of a living Savior doesn’t end there. Even the elders of the Jews saw

II. Jesus’ Power to Empower His Disciples.

“Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated and untrained men, they marveled. And they realized that they had been with Jesus.”

(Acts 4:13)

When we think of Peter and John, we think of two great apostles of Jesus Christ! In fact, Peter and John were ordinary fishermen. You know, they were like the guys out on the outer banks of New England going after cod, or those wicked tuna guys fishing for those precious blue fin tuna. Peter and John were working class, uneducated fisherman, EXCEPT that **they had been with Jesus!** Yes, these men spoke boldly! They spoke with authority! They spoke with the authority of Jesus Christ, their risen Lord! They spoke the truth clearly to these men who thought of themselves as their betters, whom the world would have thought has being Peter and John’s betters! But Peter and John had been with Jesus, and Jesus was their crucified, risen and ever-living Savior. The elders

of the Jews marveled at the boldness of speech they saw in these men. The power was in Jesus and the Spirit of God whom Jesus sent into the hearts of His apostles. What was evident in Peter and John was Jesus' power.

What was true for Peter and John is true for us. It is true for **us**! It doesn't matter if we have a college education or simply a high school diploma. It doesn't matter if one has a title like "Pastor" or even "Doctor of Divinity" behind one's name, or one spent his lifetime working in the fields or factory. What makes us different from the world is that we have been with Jesus. The time we spend with Jesus is so important. The time we spend gathered together around the Word is precious and powerful. The time we spend searching the Scriptures is time we spend sitting at the feet of our crucified, risen and ever-living Savior. In those hours we get to know Jesus better and better. More than that, He shapes our minds and hearts, and emboldens us as His witnesses.

As His disciples, (and that is exactly what we are and how we ought to think of ourselves, as being Jesus' disciples) as His disciples we witness within ourselves the power of Jesus to empower His disciples, to empower **us** to serve the Lord in our lives.

III. The Power to Steadfastly Proclaim the Gospel.

Peter and John weren't empowered to be great warriors, or athletes or sportsman, or any other hero that men strive to be. They were empowered to be true witnesses of Christ, that they might steadfastly proclaim the gospel. The council of the Jews didn't know what to do with them. They resolved to threaten them severely and forbid them to speak of Jesus anymore! These weren't empty threats as the apostles would discover later when all the disciples would be beaten for preaching in Jesus' name. And of course Peter had already told these men that they were the ones who had killed Jesus! Peter and John knew what they were up against. Now these men sought to intimidate them into silence! But note Peter and John's response of faith: "*Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you more than to God, you judge.*"²⁰ *For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.*" (Acts 4:19-20)

And so it is in this world. Today is an anniversary of a special event, Luther's bold testimony at the Diet of Worms. On our bulletin cover we have an artist's depiction of Martin Luther as he stood before another council of mighty men. Luther stood before the Emperor Charles V of the Holy Roman Empire, the leader of all the German states. Charles was hardly more than a teenager, but he was one of the most powerful men in the world at that time. This young man wouldn't flinch at ordering the end of another man's life. 500 years ago today they waited to hear Luther's response to the command presented to Luther the day before, that he retract all his writings including those concerning the untainted gospel of a crucified and risen Savior.

This was no joke. Luther prayed hard all that previous night. Christ gave Luther the power to steadfastly proclaim the gospel. We know Luther's answer, "*My conscience is bound by the Word of God! I cannot and will not recant!*" Luther could not turn back from the glorious, liberating truth of the gospel he had come to know and believe, a truth that had freed his soul from the fear of God. As a result of his confession Luther was declared outlaw by Emperor Charles, one outside the protection of the law. Anyone who arrested or killed Luther would be doing the Charles a favor. And so Luther's refuge and strength was to be and always remain in his risen and ever-living Savior.

This power of Jesus lives on within us yet today. This is what it means to have a risen and ever-living Savior. Jesus is a living power in our hearts and lives. He has brought us the assurance of sins forgiven, and peace with God, and the sure and certain hope of everlasting life. Jesus brings this truth from our hearts to our lips that we might steadfastly profess our faith in Jesus. The world, including the powerful of this world, will seek to silence us just as they tried to intimidate Peter and John, and as they tried silence Martin Luther, but they cannot silence Jesus and His gospel. He stills lives and His truth and His power abide within our hearts just as it has with those who have gone before us.

We live in uncertain and troubling times in our country, but Jesus lives! He will never leave us nor forsake us! When you read through the CLC foreign mission prayer sheet for April, you will

note that we have brothers and sisters in Christ in Nepal and Bangladesh, and in different parts of Africa that face the severest of pressures from this world, and yet the Lord Jesus keeps them strong so that they steadfastly confess Jesus as Lord and Savior. They are witnesses of the power of a living Savior, and faithfully confess His name even in the face of persecution.

We also are witnesses of the power of a risen and living Savior, and He will keep us strong and steadfast in our gospel testimony unto our end.

“The world against me rageth, Its fury I disdain;
Though bitter war it wagem, Its work is all in vain.
My heart from care is free, No trouble troubles me.
Misfortune now is play, And night is bright as day.

“Now I will cling forever To Christ, my Savior true;
My Lord will leave me never, Whate'er He passeth through.
He rends Death's iron chain, He breaks through sin and pain,
He shatters hell's dark thrall,-- I follow Him through all.”

(The Lutheran Hymnal 192:5-6)

AMEN.

And the peace of God which passes all understanding shall keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus. Amen.