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St. Paul's Lutheran Church
2100 16th Street SW
Austin, MN 55912-1749
Pastor Ted Barthels
Sermon preached on
April 25, 2021
3rd Sunday after Easter

Scripture Lessons: 1 John 3:1-2, John 10:11-18

Hymns: 364:1-5; 783; 428; 413:5

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

Sermon Text: Acts 4:23-33

²³ And being let go, they went to their own *companions* and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said to them. ²⁴ So when they heard that, they raised their voice to God with one accord and said: "Lord, You *are* God, who made heaven and earth and the sea, and all that is in them, ²⁵ who by the mouth of Your servant David have said:

'Why did the nations rage,

And the people plot vain things?

²⁶ *The kings of the earth took their stand,*

And the rulers were gathered together

Against the Lord and against His Christ.'

²⁷ "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles and the people of Israel, were gathered together ²⁸ to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done. ²⁹ Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰ by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus."

³¹ And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.

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. (NKJV)

This is the Word of God.

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

In Christ Jesus, The Good Shepherd, who gave His life for the sheep, dear fellow Redeemed:

INTRO: Good Shepherd Sunday – it's about trust.

I have trust issues. Generally, I trust other people, especially people I know well, and most especially my family, my wife and children. One of my trust issues may be that I trust other people too much. You will be disappointed when you do that. The Scriptures warn us not to trust in princes because they are so limited. (Psalm 146:3) They are fallible. They will fail. They will fall. I still trust people and rely on people a great deal. I don't think I'm alone on that one. We probably all share that issue to some extent. We might even want to argue that it's not an issue, but it is. Well, you have to trust somebody, so we do need to have a trusting relationship with other people in our lives. Life would be near impossible without it.

There is a need for another, a greater trusting relationship in our lives, and that is with the Lord. Here we run into trust issues again, at least with me, and I think probably with all of us. While we may trust other people too much, we tend to trust the Lord too little. Signs of this lack of trust, or at times of diminished trust, is when we worry, or when we feel a great sense of relief when a large sum of money comes to us, or we feel more relieved after a conversation with a doctor than after a conversation with the Lord. It comes with being a weak and sinful human being; we will have trust issues with trusting the Lord.

Today is Good Shepherd Sunday. On Good Shepherd Sunday the Lord addresses our trust issues. He reveals in no uncertain terms

the foundation for our trust in the Lord. This is why we all share a special affection for the 23rd Psalm.

“The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

*² He makes me to lie down in green pastures;
He leads me beside the still waters.*

*³ He restores my soul;
He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name’s sake.*

*⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil; For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.*

*⁵ You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;
You anoint my head with oil; My cup runs over.*

*⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me
All the days of my life;
And I will dwell in the house of the Lord Forever.”* (Psalm 23 NKJV)

This psalm teaches me that the Lord is always there for us. It makes it personal. The Lord is always there for me – for ME! He guides and directs me in the safe ways of life, to safe havens where I will be well provided for in body and soul. He guards and protects ME from every evil. He calms me in life’s darkest days. He protects me from the enemies of this world. He blesses me all the way to my heavenly home. So it is that this Good Shepherd Sunday is all about the Spirit building our trust in Jesus, our Good Shepherd who laid down His life for us and took it up again in His resurrection. (John 10:18) We have a living Savior!

In our text we learn how this plays out in life. We learn from the experience and example of the Apostles --

THEME: Trusting the Lord’s Guiding Hand.

We need to realize that this week’s text follows immediately after last week’s text. Recall that Peter and John were arrested and held overnight for healing a lame man in the name of Jesus. The Jewish High Council sought to intimidate them with severe threats, ordering them to stop preaching in the name of Jesus. Peter responded, *“We cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.”* (Acts 4:20) They were then released, and our text begins with them joining the rest of the disciples and reporting to them

what had happened. They raised their voices together in praise to the Lord and talked about how the Lord had directed all these recent events in spite of the efforts of this world to thwart the will of God in Christ Jesus. What we have before us is a lesson in how to --

I. Trust the Lord to Fulfill His Gracious Good Will.

The events surrounding Jesus' capture, and crucifixion that had shaken the apostles so severely when they were happening, they were now able to see through the lens of Holy Scripture and the eyes of faith. Someone quoted the 2nd Psalm that speaks of the kings of this world raging against the Lord and against His Christ, and how all that raging comes to nothing.

In the English they address the "Lord," however, Greek has several different words for Lord. This is not "Kyrie" a word expressing warm confidence in the Lord, but rather "despotes" the word for an absolute ruler. The apostles addressed the Lord as the One who made the heavens, earth, and all things. They saw more clearly how the Lord, the Almighty, turned the events of Jesus' passion to fulfill God's gracious good will for the salvation of mankind. God utilized all the raging of the chief priests, the machinations of Pontius Plate, and the evil of King Herod, all that would seem to undermine the Christ, to **fulfill** His plan for our salvation. So, the apostles confessed that these evil people "*were gathered together*²⁸ *to do whatever Your hand and Your purpose determined before to be done.*" (v. 29)

That was seeing the events of this world through eyes of faith. That was understanding the ways of the Lord in a way that leads to trust. By the Spirit increasing their faith and understanding, the apostles had their "trust issues" resolved.

Can we learn from this? I hope so because that is what the Spirit would have us learn: TRUST. When the events of this world would seemingly overwhelm us, when we see the forces of evil mounting an offensive against the gospel, and so also against the Lord's Christ, we too should remember the words of the 2nd Psalm. Let them do their worst, God in heaven laughs. He fulfills His will for the advancement of His kingdom of grace here on earth. The

powers of this world have no chance against the Lord and against His Christ. He is the One who is all powerful and all wise! We may not be able to see exactly how the Lord will turn things to serve His gracious good will but let us trust that He will. Jesus rules over all things for the Church. Paul wrote “*He (God) put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church.*” (Ephesians 1:22) No matter how the headlines read, what we see on the evening news, or how disturbing we find the world to be, *Trust the Lord to Fulfill His Gracious Good Will!*

The Church will not perish. The gospel will not be silenced. The elect of God will be called to faith. We will all be preserved unto eternal life!

Still struggling with trust issues? Then let us learn from the apostles to turn to prayer, and once again:

II. Trust the Efficacy of Prayer for the Holy Spirit.

Let us read their prayer and the Lord’s response.

“Now, Lord, look on their threats, and grant to Your servants that with all boldness they may speak Your word, ³⁰by stretching out Your hand to heal, and that signs and wonders may be done through the name of Your holy Servant Jesus.” ³¹And when they had prayed, the place where they were assembled together was shaken; and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and they spoke the word of God with boldness.” (Acts 4:29-31)

This prayer was an exercise of the trust of faith. They recognized all that the Lord God had done, frustrating the forces of this evil world. They then applied that lesson to life and prayed for the Lord to powerfully bless their efforts in preaching the gospel.

The Lord’s response to their prayer was immediate and powerful! The place where they were gathered was physically shaken, and once again they were filled with the Holy Spirit. They spoke the Word of God with boldness! Please note, they spoke the **Word of God** with boldness.

The immediate, visible answer to their prayer was not for their benefit alone, but also for us, to bring us an important lesson in trust and prayer. In the Epistle of James we read; “*The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.*” (James 3:16) The Lord hears our prayer of faith, and especially when we are praying for the kingdom work which we are to do, we can be assured that the Lord shall respond, for we pray for that which is according to His good and gracious will. We learn from the apostles that we do not know exactly how the Lord will turn the events and the evil of this world for the advancement of the gospel, but we are assured that He will. We learn from the apostles that when we pray for the blessing and power of the Holy Spirit upon our testimony of the gospel, the Lord will bless us with His Spirit, and with boldness as we speak His Word. Prayer is an exercise in trust.

When we don't pray, we deprive ourselves of the Lord's blessing. Again, we read in the Epistle of James: “*Yet you do not have because you do not ask. ³You ask and do not receive, because you ask amiss, that you may spend it on your pleasures.*” (James 3:2-3) We need some spiritual maturity in our prayers, the kind of maturity we see in the apostles *after* Jesus' resurrection and ascension. We need to pray that the Lord make us more spiritually minded, and not quite so materially minded. We need to remember how important prayer is to our efforts in ministry.

We need to pray for the Spirit, that the Holy Spirit enrich our faith and increase our trust. We need to pray that the Spirit bless our meditation on His Word. Let us also pray that the Spirit bless our proclamation of His Word that it might not only strengthen our faith, but also reach others whom the Lord our God would call, that they might have faith in Jesus.

Let us remember to pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ. Yes, there is a great deal to pray about. We have fellow Christians striving to advance the gospel throughout America in congregations and schools. We need to remember to pray for our schools and the teachers in our schools. It is such important work to arm our children with the Word of God for the life that lies before them. And then we want to remember in our prayers our brethren in distant lands. The monthly CLC Foreign Mission

Prayer List is a wonderful tool for this exercise of trust in prayer.
The Lord will bless even as we pray!

This will help us --

III. Trust the Lord Going Forward in Life.

That is what we see in the Apostles and the early Church they served.

“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.” (Acts 4:32-33)

We note the fruit of the Spirit that enriched the congregation in Jerusalem. They really cared for one another! What a blessing that is! It is blessing we also enjoy among us. It is a rich blessing that far exceeds any material wealth that we might have. People loved and cared for one another. The trust which they had placed in the Lord to provide for their daily needs, even in the face of persecution, was not put to shame! The Lord does grant us material blessings that we might share them: *“as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.”* (Galatians 6:10)

Trusting the Lord as we go forward in life encourages us to place our trust in His Word. We place our trust in the words and promises of God not only in matters that concern our personal lives that He will care for each of us in all our ways, but also in fulfilling our gospel calling in this life. The apostles continued to talk about Jesus, about His death and resurrection! Remember the context of our text. They had been severely threatened and ordered to stop talking about Jesus. They continued to preach the gospel of a crucified and risen Savior. Because of that the gospel spread, and the Lord’s Kingdom grew so that **we** have faith in Jesus as our Redeemer, and **we** possess the hope of resurrection to eternal life. Learn the lesson of trust in this gospel and know that your trust is not misplaced any more than that of the apostles.

Those final words of our text are so wonderful! “*Great grace was upon them all!*” What a blessing, a blessing that is there for us also. Great grace is there for us because the Lord is my Shepherd. He cares for me and YOU, in all our ways. He watches over us and guides and guards and protects us. He keeps us on the paths of righteousness until we also shall dwell with Him in the house of the Lord forever.

AMEN.

“Now may the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.” Amen. (Romans 15:13)