

St. Stephen Lutheran Church - Pastor Mark Gullerud - June 15, 2025 - Trinity Sunday

Sermon Text: Acts 4:1-12 Now as they spoke to the people, the priests, the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees came upon them, 2 being greatly disturbed that they taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. 3 And they laid hands on them, and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. 4 However, many of those who heard the word believed; and the number of the men came to be about five thousand. 5 And it came to pass, on the next day, that their rulers, elders, and scribes, 6 as well as Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the family of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem. 7 And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, "By what power or by what name have you done this?" 8 Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: 9 "If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, 10 "let 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. 11 "This is the 'stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' 12 "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

Sermon Theme: The Holy Spirit Causes the Church to Grow in spite of fierce opposition to the Gospel of Christ.

In the name of Jesus Christ, who sent the Holy Spirit to enable us to believe in Jesus and to confess Him before others, dear fellow redeemed;

The growth of the Christian Church in Jerusalem during the first days of the New Testament era was really quite extraordinary. On Pentecost Sunday there were some 3,000 souls converted to Christianity. Following that Spirit-filled day, Scripture records that "The Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved." Every single day there were conversions to the Christian faith.

The rate of conversions was so massive and so steady that a short while later when Peter and John healed a lame man at the temple, the number of Christians in Jerusalem increased to well in excess of 5,000. We say in excess of, because the figure of 5,000 in our text is only counting the men and did not take into account the Christian women and children of whom there were no doubt many. So then, in the space of a very short period of time, the Christian Church in Jerusalem exposed in number to what we would call today a megachurch.

Concerning these early believers Scripture says of them that "they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine." These new found Christians gladly received all the teachings of the apostles, because the Holy Spirit enabled them to look upon all the doctrines of the apostles as the true Word of God.

It shouldn't surprise us to find so many more embracing the Christian faith when the apostles preached then when Jesus preached. After all, it was Jesus who had initially sown the seed of the Word among many of these people and now with the apostles watering of it through the preaching of the Gospel that seed which Jesus had sown was bearing fruit in the form of saving faith. This effect of the Word upon the hearts of people

is something we need to keep in mind so that we don't become discouraged or disheartened whenever we do not see immediate results from our witnessing to others. Our testimony to some may serve to prepare their hearts for a later time when the Spirit of God leads them to believe in Jesus Christ. In still other cases, we may encounter individuals that confess a faith in Christ, but who are unwittingly entangled in false beliefs. While some of these individuals may be initially unreceptive to the witness of God's truths, yet since that Word of God has been planted in their minds, in time the Spirit of God could eventually enlighten their understanding through that testimony.

On the same day Peter and John were in the temple, there were still others with whom Jesus had sown the seed of the Word and didn't believe. These, unlike the thousands of Jews who were converted, continued to remain in their unbelief after hearing the preaching of the apostles. Our text lists these individuals as being the Jewish priests, the captain of the temple guard, and certain Sadducees.

These were "greatly disturbed that they (that is, Peter and John) taught the people and preached in Jesus the resurrection from the dead." These Jewish leaders took offense at the Christian teaching which declared that the crucified Lord Jesus had risen from the dead as Savior of the world and that on the last day He will raise all the dead from their graves and sit in judgment of everyone.

The Jewish priests questioned the apostles' authority to preach and teach others concerning spiritual matters. After all, the apostles were viewed as uneducated fishermen who had not attended any accredited theological school and therefore didn't have any recognized credentials to teach religion. Besides their early years of confirmation-like training in the synagogue, the only other formal training these fishermen had received was three years of instruction from Jesus of Nazareth, who had spent most of his life working as a carpenter in Galilee and had suffered the accursed death of crucifixion. What the critics failed to realize was that Jesus had greater credentials to instruct and train ministers of the Word than any human religious institution, because He is the second person of the Godhead who came from the bosom of the heavenly Father to declare Him to us. He delivered to the apostles God's eternal plan for our salvation which they then faithfully proclaimed and recorded in Scripture by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The Sadducees undoubtedly were the ones who took exception to the apostles' teaching of the resurrection of the dead through Jesus Christ. The Sadducees belonged to the Jewish sect that didn't believe in a life after death or a day of divine judgment and retribution at the end of time. It was concerning this very teaching of the resurrection and a life after death that the Sadducees had disputed with Jesus.

The Sadducees were the freethinkers of the religious community in their day. They didn't accept all the writings of the Old Testament Scriptures. Instead, they chose to accept only those portions of Scripture that were to their liking and relied upon their human reasoning to judge and interpret various religious teachings. This general way of thinking is quite widespread in our day. There are many professing a belief in God who like to pick and choose what they will accept or reject in the Bible. It is as if they look upon the Bible as a smorgasbord of teachings which they are at liberty to either take or leave, depending what strikes their fancy. In order to justify their disregard for certain teachings of the Bible they say those are

merely fallible writings of man or they resort to twisting and turning the meaning of the clear Word of God until it lines up with their way of thinking.

Also, since some wrongfully hold that it is not possible to say with absolute certainty what is the correct understanding of many teachings in Scripture, they are very tolerant of the differing interpretations and beliefs of others, provided others in turn are tolerant of their beliefs. However, many of these otherwise tolerant ones can not abide anyone saying that they are in error or that the teachings of the Bible are clear and unambiguous.

While the Sadducees would, at times, make allowances for a certain degree of contradictory religious thought, being the freethinkers that they were, yet they could not stand idly by and allow the apostles to declare that the teaching of the resurrection through the crucified and risen Lord Jesus was the absolute truth of God. This teaching struck at the very heart and core of the Sadducees' misbeliefs. It hit a sensitive nerve with them, because the truth of it meant that they had been guilty of wrongfully rejecting the Lord and His gift of salvation, and had shamefully caused the Lord of glory to be crucified. And if Jesus is the Savior who will come on the last day to decide their eternal fate, they would be faced with a fearful prospect of ending up in hell. Not wanting to face up to this stark reality the Sadducees caused Peter and John to be arrested and to stand trial before the Sanhedrin. This Jewish court was the very same that had tried and condemned Jesus just a short time prior to this.

Hoping to find some fault in the apostles which could be used against them, the Sanhedrin questioned them about their healing of the lame man at the temple the day before. They asked the apostles by what power or by what name they did this. While the Sanhedrin quizzed them about the healing, the underlying reason for the apostles standing before the court was because of their teaching of the Gospel of Christ.

In those situations of life where our Christian values and beliefs are called into question, what would be a God-pleasing way of responding? It certainly wouldn't be fitting to shrink back and say nothing, as this would not serve to dispel the spiritual darkness that enshrouds and enslaves the mind of the questioner, and it would not cause the name of God to be glorified. Jesus says to us, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven." (Mt.5:14-16) The apostle Peter also exhorts us with these words, "Always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear; having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed." (1 Pet. 3:15)

As Peter and John stood before the Sanhedrin, they didn't remain silent nor did they give way in what they were fully convinced concerning the saving Word of God. Instead, with courage of heart Peter gave this answer, "Rulers of the people and elders of Israel: If we this day are judged for a good deed done to a helpless man, by what means he has been made well, let 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. This is the stone which was rejected by you builders, which has become the chief cornerstone.' Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved."

This answer was not by any means a proud and arrogant reply. It was not Peter's intention in this to boastfully show how right he was concerning Jesus and how wrong they had been, nor was it his design to rub the Sanhedrin's noses in their sin. Rather it was Peter's heartfelt desire to make them aware of their misguided belief and of their sin, and to bring them to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ. Addressing the assembly in a very respectful manner, Peter first of all pointed to the miraculous healing performed in the name of Jesus which gave proof Jesus is alive and active, and that He is the Lord of glory. Through the apostles' testimony of Jesus' resurrection the Sadducees once again were given an opportunity to learn there is indeed a resurrection of the dead and a life after death. Peter also kindly tried to make the Jewish leaders aware of their serious misjudgment in having rejected Jesus, testifying that Jesus is the capstone or cornerstone upon which the Church of God is established. Hoping that this testimony would lead his hearers to repentance Peter then proclaimed the glorious gospel message that eternal salvation is to be found in none other than Jesus Christ.

The spirit with which Peter bore witness of the Gospel of Christ to those who opposed them is a good example of how we ought to testify to those who live in spiritual darkness. Having a heartfelt concern for the spiritual welfare of the misguided it would be beneficial if we shared with them the truths of God with a humble spirit and with utmost respect. It is very important for us to speak in this manner if there is to be any hope of winning them over to the truth.

It is by the grace of God we have been brought to a heartfelt knowledge of the saving truths of God. The Lord also wants to show that same grace to others through our testimony to them. If there is ever any fear or apprehension on our part to speak and testify of the teachings of Christ, it is helpful to remember that it was through the aid of the Spirit of God that Peter was enabled to speak out with boldness and confidence. The Lord also promises us that He will assist us in our efforts of confessing Him before the world, as we look to His word for knowledge and to His Spirit for the will and strength to speak of Him.

May God use us as His instruments to confess His saving name before the world, even in the face of opposition, so that through our testimony of the Lord the Holy Spirit might cause the light of the knowledge of the Savior God to shine brightly in their hearts. Amen