

Preacher: Vicar Tim Redfield Date: March 30, 2008 Text: Acts 2:14a, 22-32

Theme: Proclaim the Resurrection

Imagine that you have survived a plane crash and are stranded on an island, how confident are you that you are going to be rescued? Well, that might depend on how long you are stranded for. At first, you reason that people must be searching for you. You may think that with all the technology available, someone must be coming for you soon. Perhaps a satellite has tracked the crash and the rescue planes will be arriving soon. After a month or two months or even three months pass, you might start to doubt if a rescue is ever going to come.

Have you ever wondered what it was like for the Old Testament believers waiting for their rescue – the promised Messiah? Many of them never saw that rescue and yet they were confident that it was going to come. When Jesus came to earth, he rescued all people. Our Lord has rescued us in a much more important way than someone being rescued from a plane crash. Our God rescued us from eternal damnation through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Christ's resurrection equips and motivates us to proclaim the resurrection. The resurrection gives us a confident faith and this resurrection also gives us a message to boldly witness to others.

Part 1: It gives us a confident faith

The sermon text that we are looking at today comes from the Apostle Peter's Pentecost sermon. When Peter gave this proclamation, he and the other disciples had just been blessed with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Jesus had promised this gift of the Holy Spirit to them and it had strengthened them in their faith. Because of the gift of the Holy Spirit, the disciples now proclaimed their faith boldly and confidently.

During Jesus' ministry, these same disciples had not understood that Jesus needed to suffer, die, and rise. These are the same disciples who ran away when Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane. These disciples had been hiding in a locked room on Easter evening because they were afraid that the Jews would persecute them. They didn't fully believe in the resurrection until they had seen Jesus with their own eyes. Now, it was these disciples who were proclaiming the message of the resurrection.

The first verse of this reading tells us that Peter stood up as the spokesperson for the disciples and addressed the crowd (v14a). Not that long ago, late at night on Maundy Thursday, Peter had been so afraid that he denied ever knowing Jesus. Now on Pentecost, Peter spoke to a large crowd about his confident faith in the resurrection. Peter shows that his faith has been strengthened by the Holy Spirit. Shortly after the resurrection Jesus had reinstated him and instructed Peter to "Feed his lambs." Now Peter had an incredible chance to give the message of the resurrection to many people.

Peter pointed out to the crowd that all the miracles of Jesus showed that he was the Messiah sent by God (v22). Then he got right to the heart of the matter, telling the crowd that they had put Jesus to death by nailing him on a cross (v23). This message was probably hard for the people to hear. Many of them did not yet realize that they were personally to blame for Christ's death, but the truth is that all people's sins are the reason that Jesus went to the cross and died. Even if people were objecting to Peter's telling them that they had killed Jesus, Peter didn't give them time to argue. Peter followed immediately with the message of the resurrection. He told the crowd that it was God who raised Jesus from the dead (v24). Jesus, who died on the cross, had been miraculously raised to life.

Peter pointed out to the crowd the confident faith in the resurrection that King David displayed when he wrote Psalm 16. By inspiration of the Holy Spirit, nearly a thousand years before these events took place, David wrote that God would not abandon Jesus to the grave or even let his body decay (v27). He knew for certain even then that the Messiah was going to rise from the grave. David trusted in the risen Lord for his salvation.

David had a faith just like us. He believed in the resurrection even though he had never seen it. Unfortunately, there are people in this world who have a great deal of trouble believing in the resurrection because they have never seen anything like it. The resurrection of a dead body does not make sense to human reasoning. Just like any other miracle, there are people who think that the resurrection is a nice story, or a myth, that did not really take place. It is sad that there are even some churches that teach this and don't really believe in a risen Savior.

Sometimes doubts about our faith and even the resurrection can come into our hearts. The devil tries to get us to doubt the miracles of Easter and our sure hope of eternal life. This can happen because we were not eye-witnesses of the event and because a miracle of someone rising from the dead is just so unbelievable to human ways of thinking. When doubts do come up in our hearts it is a sin. It is sinful to doubt the sure facts of our salvation history because that kind of doubt puts our forgiveness and eternal life in jeopardy.

How can we be confident in the resurrection? The reason that we can be confident comes entirely from our God. The faith that we have is a miracle of the Holy Spirit who comes into our hearts and removes any doubts that we may have about our salvation. The Holy Spirit removed all the doubts and questions of the disciples and gave them the confidence that they displayed on Pentecost. God gives us confidence as we continue to grow in our faith through

meditation upon his Word. The entire Bible contains the inspired account of how our Savior came to save us from our sins through his death and resurrection. In the New Testament we have the eye-witness accounts of the men who saw Jesus alive after his resurrection. God's Word removes doubt and gives us a confident faith. The Apostle Paul points out the importance of the resurrection for our faith. He says, "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins" (1 Cor 15:17). The resurrection is the cornerstone of our faith. Without the resurrection, our sins would not be forgiven. The resurrection assures us that Jesus conquered the grave, that indeed we are forgiven and we also will rise one day.

Part 2: It gives us a message to boldly witness to others

The message of the resurrection is important news that we want to boldly witness to others. Look at the Apostle Peter. He boldly testified about the difference between Jesus and all other spiritual leaders. He pointed out that even David, a very spiritual man who was admired by the Jewish people, had died and been buried (v29). The prophecies of David had to be pointing ahead to Christ because Christ is the one who rose from the grave (v30-31). King David's words in the Old Testament witnessed to the resurrection and strengthened the faith of many believers.

Peter's faith had also been strengthened so that he could boldly proclaim the message of the resurrection. Peter told the crowd why they could trust his testimony. He said boldly, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of this fact" (v32). Because Peter had seen the risen Lord with his own eyes, people could confidently know that he was telling the truth. After Pentecost, Peter continued to spread the gospel message to many people.

Sit down sometime and read through the book of Acts and you will see how the Apostles and other believers testified boldly to the truth of the Gospel and the early church kept on growing. Those early believers went out and preached the Word in spite of opposition. Because of the persecution it would have been easy for them to give up and not preach the Word of God. If the resurrection had not really occurred, it would have been foolish for these early believers to endure the persecution. However, being blessed by the Lord with courage and persistence, the Apostles boldly proclaimed the truth of the resurrection message and the importance of it for the salvation of all people.

Throughout history we see many Christians boldly proclaim the message of the resurrection even though they had to endure persecution. One of the best examples of a bold witness of the gospel is Martin Luther. Martin Luther proclaimed the truth of the resurrection and the importance of the full and free forgiveness of Christ. Because of his bold testimony, Luther was always persecuted by the people who disagreed with the message of the scriptures. But because of the boldness and confidence of Luther, the truth of God's Word was proclaimed and our church today remains strong in the truth of God's Word.

What about each one of us? How do we proclaim the resurrection? We also follow the example of the believers that have gone before us, boldly telling the message of the resurrection. Every time we gather in church for worship we proclaim this message. Every week we meditate upon the importance of Jesus' death and resurrection for our lives here on earth and also our eternal lives in heaven. We carry this message with us into our homes, workplaces, and other areas of our lives. Our faith influences our decisions and our actions. We reflect the love of Christ that has been shown to us.

A way that some of us proclaim the resurrection is by going into the public ministry. Our Synod has a ministerial education program that is a great benefit to all the members of our church body. Some people go on to become pastors, teachers, and staff ministers for churches throughout the world. These called workers boldly confess the resurrection because it is of vital importance to the faith of all believers in Jesus. Even though called workers are speaking this truth on a daily basis, so are all Christian lay people. All Christians witness boldly when they stand up for the Word of God. Christian parents proclaim the resurrection by bringing up their children in the way of the Lord. We proclaim the resurrection by giving our friends good Christian advice. Each one of us can instruct others in the truths of the Bible. So many people are thirsty for the truths of the gospel, and we have what they need - the glorious message of the resurrection - go out and share this good news!

Conclusion

Think again about surviving a plane crash and being stranded on an island. What if, after surviving on the island for five months, you were finally rescued? You would tell people the story. You would tell others how you survived for those five months. You would tell everyone you met about how thankful you were when someone finally came and rescued you. You would share your joy. We have an even greater joy to share. Because of Jesus' perfect sacrifice we are forgiven and we will inherit eternal life. We are confident of our own resurrection because we are 100% certain of Christ's resurrection. We have the testimony of the eye-witnesses and we have the faith in our hearts created by the Holy Spirit. May each one of us be encouraged to share the message so that many may trust in the resurrection and join us one day in the paradise of heaven.