

“Resurrection Evidence”

April 27, 2025

First Christian Church

Scripture Text: Acts 5:27-32

You were sent emails and invited to read the Gospel of Luke through the season of Lent, and many of you did. Well, Acts might be the next book for you to read. I say that because scholars have done extensive studies comparing sentence structure, word selection, style and so forth and have determined that the book of Acts was written by the same person as the Gospel of Luke. But I am not that sophisticated. I just looked at the first few verses of the two books. The gospel of Luke begins with the author addressing the recipient, the “excellent Theophilus,” and proclaiming his desire to “write a well-ordered account” of Jesus’ life and all that it fulfilled. Meanwhile the book of Acts begins, “In the first book, Theophilus, I wrote about all that Jesus began to do and teach until the day when He was taken up to heaven.” It is subtle, but I think we can go with the scholars on this one. Acts is basically volume 2 of Luke. Luke is about Jesus’ life and ministry and Acts is about what happened after Jesus’ death and resurrection via the Holy Spirit and the early church.

Anyway, what has happened between the end of Luke and our reading from the 5th chapter of Acts is perhaps a more convincing witness to the fact that Jesus has risen from the grave than last week’s empty tomb. Let me tell you what I mean by that. To be excessively blunt, Jesus’ disciples end the Gospel stories with large capital “L’s” written on their foreheads. Big time losers. I say that because they were defined by fear. Less than 2 weeks ago you were reading in Luke how the disciples scattered and ran for their lives when Jesus was arrested. They left Him alone in His most trying times. Peter came back and tried to at least see what was happening to Jesus, and 3 times ended up denying he even knew Jesus because he was afraid of being arrested. I get that. It did not look good for Jesus, and the disciples would not be any good to anybody if they were executed too. After Jesus was crucified, most of the disciples were huddled together, hiding behind locked doors out of fear. Some had left, maybe trying to get their old lives back since following Jesus didn’t work out. They were thinking, “If they whipped and beat and finally crucified Jesus, they would do the same to anyone who tried to continue on with what He was doing.” Being arrested in connection with Jesus was their greatest fear, because it would certainly lead to death. That fear defined them.

Now look at them in Acts 5. A couple of them kind of accidentally started telling about Jesus in the temple. They were arrested and told to never speak of Jesus again. They didn’t listen and intentionally went back to the temple and started teaching about Jesus. In response, the leadership didn’t just arrest the 2 speakers, but all 12 apostles. But somehow the Holy Spirit lifted them out of jail before their trial and told them to go back to the temple and tell about Jesus. First thing in the morning, they were all there preaching and teaching. Now they are

standing before the very council that helped move Jesus to the cross. The high priest begins to question them, saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching." Peter and the others respond, "We must obey God rather than any human authority." Who are these people? Not only defying but sassing the authorities that condemned Jesus to death! Where are the men that ran from the garden of Gethsemane? Where is the Peter who was afraid for anyone to even think he knew Jesus? Where are the disciples who hid themselves behind locked doors out of fear? This is what they were the most afraid of. Yet here they stand, not cowering in fear but backtalking with sass.

Jesus' resurrection has changed them. For me, the change in the disciples is a more convincing witness to the fact that Jesus has risen from the grave than last week's empty tomb. Before they met the risen Lord, their fear of death made them try to disassociate themselves with Jesus. As Peter said in Luke 22, "Woman, I do not know Him." Now, after the resurrection, the acknowledgment of death makes them desperate to claim Him. They are basically saying to the authorities, "Your best shot moved Jesus from this world to a whole new realm where there is no hunger, no violence, no intimidation, no sickness, no brokenness. Go ahead, please, hit me with your best shot too."

People involved in a lie, in fraud, in a cover-up will only suffer so much before they crack and tell the truth. Very few people are willing to suffer for very long in defense of a lie. Very, very few people can stand to see their family members suffer in defense of a lie. And very, very, very few people are willing to die for what they know is a lie. The disciples turned apostles suffered all that. And not one of them crumbled. Resurrection is not a lie, not a hoax, not a cover-up. Resurrection is a gift from God that comes in the shape of Jesus.

And that kind of proof is what non-believers are looking for in us. Are we just as afraid as everyone else, or are we different? Do we have the same fears as everyone else, or has resurrection changed us?

The wording of Peter and the apostles' response to the high priest and the council give us a clue of what "being different" could look like. They begin by saying, "We must obey God rather than any human authority," and go on in verse 31 to say, "God exalted Jesus at His right hand as Leader and Savior that He might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Listen to that again. "God exalted Jesus... that He might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins." Both the repentance and the forgiveness are gifts from Jesus. Remember repentance is turning away from the way we are living our lives and turning toward the way God wants us to live our lives. God sharing with us the vision of what our lives should look like is part of the gift of Jesus. It is the gracious gift of getting our priorities straight – Love the Lord you God with all you heart, soul, mind and strength, and love you neighbor as yourself. Loving God and neighbor comes before getting even, before getting ahead, even before being right. Getting

our priorities straight is a gift. Knowing how God wants us to be in relationship with each other is a gift too. In Tuesday's Teaching Moment we are in the midst of studying the 10 commandments as foundations for starting a new community. The Israelites have been slaves for generations, and God has brought them out of slavery to form a new nation in the Promise Land. The 10 Commandments serve as guardrails that keep them and us from going too far in our relationships with one another and causing injury to ourselves and others. They are relational by nature. Last week we talked about commandment 8, "You shall not steal" and used Ephesians 4 to help interpret it. Verse 28 says, "Let the thief no longer steal, but rather let him labor, doing honest work with his hands, so that he may be able to give to those in need." It says don't steal, but why? Why not steal if it gets you what you need? Because you were not created to just survive – to be a parasite – to live off of other people. You were created to be a gift to other people. It says do honest work so you can give to the poor. Jesus and the New Testament also help us understand stealing is not limited to other people's stuff. We can steal their time when we show up late, steal their credit when we pretend their idea is our own, steal their joy when we fail to simply rejoice with them. According to James 5, withholding what is due is stealing. As in not paying a living wage, buying clothes made with slave labor, or going to a store and pumping the salesperson who is paid on commissions for tons of information to help you make your decision, then buying it online. And there are 9 other commandments Jesus and the New Testament help shed new light on in how we are to behave and interact with others.

The vision of repentance – what a person should be and how a human should practice our dominion over the earth – is as much a gift as the forgiveness. Jesus gives us that picture. We see Jesus sit with tax collectors and sinners, wooing them back home to the faith and righteousness. Yet we also see it as He sits and dines with scribes and the Pharisees and woos them back home to faith and righteousness. One group needed lifting-up as they recognized they were more than their profession or their latest behavior. They needed to know God gave them their value. The other group needed to be brought down a notch as they recognized they were less than their profession and recent behavior – their value still given by God. Both were wooed by Jesus to see more than they could see. Jesus found a way to share mercy, grace and forgiveness while still holding the bar really high for what it means to be a child of God.

This kind of living: rising above fearing human authority in order to obey God, rising above vengeance in order to love, rising above just surviving in order to be a gift, rising above who we think we are in order to be who God has created us to be; this kind of living is a greater proof of Jesus' resurrection than any empty tomb. Do you believe in the resurrection, or do you crumble under the pressure of life?

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