

Acts 5:12,17-32. ¹² The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." ²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." ²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. ²⁵ Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. ²⁷ Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." ²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Go Forth in the Name of Your Risen Lord

- 1. Set Free from Fear and Doubt***
- 2. Sent Out to Proclaim the Full Message of Life***

It is a week later, and many will come back in some way today. The sound of a bomb blast still ringing in some of their ears, the memory still very much etched in their minds, and yet Christians in Sri Lanka will come back to worship their Lord and Savior. Last week as these Christians were celebrating the good news of the resurrection of Jesus Christ, men with evil intentions carried out their murderous plot. More than 200 people were killed in coordinated terrorist attacks in Sri Lanka. Many of those killed in these attacks died in Christian churches on Easter day. Today like so many Christians around the world, believers even in that place will come back together again to worship their LORD and Savior. For this the confidence that we have through faith: ***because he lives, we too shall live.*** Our redeemer

lives to chase away our fears, he lives to dry our tears. The one who came to forgive our sins, guides us through life, and will bring us to life eternal. This is message of life and hope that our Lord has given us.

Despite this opposition, despite this persecution, despite this horrible act of hatred, these attempts to shake and destroy the faith of God's people, today many will come back, because Christ has been raised from the dead. This is a message that we cannot let go of, it is a message that will not let go of us, for as our Lord tells us no one, no nothing, can pluck us from the hand of our God. Yes, as the Church of Christ we **Go Forth in the Name of Our Risen Lord. We are Set Free from Fear and Doubt. We are Sent Out to Proclaim the Full Message of Life.**

In our lesson for today from Acts 5, the apostles had been singled out, persecuted, imprisoned, and publicly disgraced for doing nothing wrong. They had been healing and helping people, they had been proclaiming the good news of Jesus Christ, but some did not approve. Filled with the zeal for their own cause, the leaders of the Jewish people had these men arrested and thrown in public jail.

The apostles had been threatened and imprisoned and publicly disgraced for teaching in the temple courts, and so when God sent an angel to set the apostles free, where would they go? Would they flee to the hills? Would they seek asylum in some remote corner of the world and hide their faith? Would they shut their mouths, and shutter their doors and windows and once again hide behind locked doors? No, according to God's command they would go back to the temple and they would preach and teach once again. They would boldly proclaim the message of Christ crucified and risen for the forgiveness of sins and for the gift of eternal life for all who believe. They would not be silenced. Set free from fear and doubt they would speak the full message of life. They would go forth with confidence and boldness in the name of the risen Lord.

What a surprise it must have been to the leaders to find these men not only out of the jail, but back again in the temple courts. They could hardly believe it when someone came and said, ***"Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people."*** They went out and led the apostles away again, this time bringing them before the highest religious court of the land. Standing before the chief priest and the Sanhedrin, the entire religious council of Jewish leaders, they pressured the disciples to stop preaching this message that was so offensive to their ears. ²⁸ ***"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."*** Would they back down? Surely, you would think that would soften their words, take back some of their statements, or stand in terrified silence when put under this pressure by the same group that had brought about the death of Christ Jesus. By no means! Instead they spoke up. They could not be silent, Peter and the apostles, responded in a bold and unified trust in God. ***"We must obey God rather than men!"***

What terrific faith and a living breathing trust in God that the LORD had implanted in these apostles and these believers now expressed through this common confession. They were united together and strengthened in the name of Jesus. They would not back down. They would not be silent, but they would speak, they were commanded by God and compelled by faith and love of God and love of neighbor to speak this message of life. And that is what they would do; and notice how they would reach out in truth and love to the very ones who opposed and threatened them. The apostles responded to the chief priest and the Sanhedrin in this way: ³⁰ ***The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.*** ³¹ ***God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.*** With these words, the apostles did not back down from the truth that Jesus was crucified because of the influence of these men. But it very much appears that these words were spoken not in spiteful defiance or hatred, but these words of truth were spoken with a remarkable touch of compassion as it called to repentance the very men responsible for the death of Jesus, and included them in the invitation to believe in Jesus and be saved.

Again, notice how the apostles spoke in a way that they might connect with the Jewish leaders. ***The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead.*** Even the way the apostles referred to the crucifixion was in a manner that appealed to the common knowledge of Scripture that they apostles shared with the those that made up the Sanhedrin. The Scriptures proclaimed, *“Cursed is everyone who is hung on tree.”* And Jesus was cursed in the place of sinners, punished for the sins of the world, and God was so pleased with his work that God had exalted Jesus Christ, raising him from the dead, and now setting him at this position of authority of his right hand. Jesus is the very Savior that had been promised for ages for this very purpose of leading the people of Israel, including these very men, to repentance and giving them the forgiveness of sins.

The apostles would not be silent. This message was too important. They would not cave in to the pressures mounting around them. They would live their faith. They would share their faith, even reaching out with this message of life to the very men who were trying to imprison and get rid of them.

What an example of faith for us today! To revisit and recall the unity of faith, to see the boldness of the apostles’ confession, and witness the power of the Holy Spirit working through his word, this is a great blessing for us as believers today. When we look around at what is going on in the world today, doubt and fear may easily creep into our own hearts and minds. Even when tragedy strikes on the other side of the world, the aftershocks of such persecution ripple out in such a manner that it may shake our faith. And Satan will try to find any way that he can get to get under our skin and into our head. The devil desires and hunts for any opening so that he may pry into our hearts with his lies and pry us away from God. The devil would have us fear such tragedy would have us desert any such association with Christ, or at least to distance ourselves and make our connection to Christ as more of the role of casual observer, or conveniently located on the edges of things, ready to duck out when things get difficult. Thus, in

our sinful weakness we begin to wonder if it is worth it. Is it worth our comfort, our personal safety? Is it worth our very life to be a Christian? Our sinful nature may think, *Easter has come and gone, shouldn't we just kind of lay this message aside for a while. Maybe we shouldn't make such a big deal about our faith, that way things will probably go more smoothly. This way we can avoid the hassle. This way we may avoid the slightest taste or possibility of persecution. After all, is it really worth it, to put ourselves at risk by talking about our faith publicly?*

Our sinful flesh is weak, and our old evil foe is crafty, therefore, we may be easily fall into such thinking. Or the devil may twist our fear of persecution and opposition in a different way; that we begin to hate and act in hate towards those that do not share our faith or who oppose us. In this way the devil might keep others from Jesus and might take us down in the process too as he leads us down a path that is not aligned with the Word of God.

Dear fellow believers look at these men preaching in the temple courts and hear them proclaim the full message of this new life that is given to us in Christ! The Lord Jesus lives. God's own Son died for the sins of the world. He is our Savior and rescues us from the eternal death that our sins, our doubts, our hate deserves. He is the only way of salvation.

His name must go out, his truth must be proclaimed, especially to those who do not yet believe. And through the power of his word, he changes our hearts and minds as we go forth proudly in the name of Jesus. He is the way and the truth and the life. Jesus lives, he grants us daily breath. He lives and we shall conquer death. He lives our mansion to prepare. He lives to bring us safely there. Our risen Lord sets sinners free from our fear of punishment, the fear of opposition, as he unites us with fellow believers so that we may live as the body of Christ. As the body of Christ, we will publicly live out our faith. Despite the opposition of the world and our sinful flesh and Satan himself, we will continue to gather together to hear the word of God. Despite the hatred that may be shown to us, we will live lives that demonstrate compassion and love even to those who oppose or threaten us. Despite the threat of ridicule and opposition we will speak this saving message, the full message of life that our Lord Jesus has given us. This will include not backing down from addressing sin and it will also mean announcing the full and free forgiveness that Christ has graciously supplied for all sinners.

Week after week we come back to this place for good reason, the Lord Jesus lives. He was hung on a tree to be a curse for us. He came to take away all our sins and to give us the gift of new and eternal life. His resurrection proves it. See his hands. See his side. Know that your Savior lives, your sins have been forgiven, eternal life is yours, and your living Savior will guide and protect you through this life as you live a full life in thankful service to him who saves you. Dear fellow believers, go forth in the name of Jesus. You have been set free from doubt and fear. Go forth in the name of Jesus, and live and proclaim his message of new life. Amen.