

A New Message

Acts 2:22-32

INTRODUCTION

As I begin this message, I want to introduce you to one of our sister congregations in the North American Lutheran Church. I will be doing this at the beginning of each of my sermons for these Sundays where we are worshipping in this temporary site. These churches that you will meet do this every week. They don't have a beautiful sanctuary, and all the fancy and comfortable elements that make us feel at home.

Today we meet Trinity Lutheran Church in St. Charles, Minnesota.

- Their pastor is Doug Hedman. His wife is Faith.
- They were founded in 2020, right in the heart of the pandemic.
- They meet each week in a community center, with worship beginning at 9:30 a.m. Sunday School is at 8:30 a.m.
- They meet that early because the community center is needed for other activities by mid-day.
- Each Sunday morning, they gather to set up their worship space and then tear it down as soon as they are finished. Many items are loaded into trailers and taken to storage until the following week.

As we experience this temporary setting, let us remember our Christian brothers and sisters who also worship in temporary settings. And let us remember that in many ways it is incredibly appropriate that we begin this next season of our church year in a new location. It is also quite appropriate that we begin with a series of sermons based on the book of Acts.

- Acts is the story of the church, the story of the first Christians as they try to live out what Jesus had told them.
- Acts begins with the Ascension of Jesus in chapter 1 and tells of the arrival of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost in the early verses of chapter 2.

For those first Christians, the new started on Easter, the moment they received word that the tomb was empty. From that moment forward, everything about their faith was disrupted. Think about it:

- After Easter, they realized they no longer needed animal sacrifices. The Lamb of God had been sacrificed once for all time.
- They now knew that the long-awaited Messiah had come. They had walked with Him, and watched as every prophecy about him was fulfilled.
- The confusing things in the Old Testament suddenly clicked! As in *"Oh, that's what Isaiah meant when he said ..."*

At first those Christians continued to worship at the Temple. We read in this same second chapter of Acts, for example:

Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. (Acts 2:46)

And in the following chapter

One day Peter and John were going up to the temple at the time of prayer—at three in the afternoon. (Acts 3:1)

They were Jews, after all. The Temple is where Jews worship.

But they were now Jews of a different sort. Something had happened to them – something that made everything different. It made everything new.

- When those Christians went to the Temple, they were still Jews.
- But the worship they experienced was incomplete. It didn't proclaim Jesus.

And over time, the change **IN** them started to create problems **FOR** them.

As a result they began to put more and more emphasis on holding their meetings in alternative locations. They became a church on the move. Displaced.

They were still Jews ... but now they were Jews with a new message.

That new message had three main parts.

PART #1: THE CROSS WAS GOD'S DELIBERATE PLAN

Look at verse 23:

This man (Jesus) was handed over to you by God's deliberate plan and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. (Acts 2:23)

Good Friday was not an accident. It belonged to the eternal plan of God. In fact, as the Scriptures portray it, Jesus is:

... the Lamb who was slaughtered before the world was made. (Revelation 13:8)

God was never surprised by the wickedness of humanity. Before He ever created us, He knew we would need a Savior.

- That's one of the key truths we need to grasp in our walks with Jesus. God is never surprised by anything that we do or think or need.
- God never has to say "Oops! I didn't see that one coming!"

Neither was Good Friday the end of the story. It is the turning point of the story.

- Good Friday is always followed by Easter Sunday.
- Resurrection – new life – always follows the darkness of death.

You never read "Jesus died. The End."

As one writer expressed it:

The cross is a window in time that allows us to see the love that has eternally existed in the heart of God. (*William Barclay*)

PART #2: JESUS FULFILLED ALL PROPHECY

Fellow Israelites, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. But he was a prophet ... (Acts 2:29)

And like all the prophets that come – whose words and actions are recorded throughout the Old Testament – David pointed to Jesus.

- Jesus even quoted Psalm 22 from the cross:

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me? (Psalm 22:1)

- In one of his arguments with the religious leaders Jesus quotes Psalm 110

While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, “What do you think about the Messiah? Whose son is he?” “The son of David,” they replied.

He said to them, “How is it then that David, speaking by the Spirit, calls him ‘Lord’? For he says,

“‘The Lord said to my Lord:

“Sit at my right hand
until I put your enemies
under your feet.””

If then David calls him ‘Lord,’ how can he be his son?” No one could say a word in reply, and from that day on no one dared to ask him any more questions. (Matthew 22:41-46)

Every Old Testament prophecy about the coming Messiah was fulfilled in Jesus. A conservative estimate identifies 456 such prophecies.

- The first Christians – and down to us today – constantly need to remind our hearers that Jesus is the One sent by God.
- Their message at Pentecost and beyond was simple:

Read the Bible. You will be convinced.

In modern days people like Lee Strobel and Josh McDowell have written extensively on this. Strobel was not a Christian and set out to prove to his wife once and for all that Christianity was phony. He became a believer instead.

Prophecy proves it!

PART #3: THE RESURRECTION IS THE FINAL PROOF

Look at verse 32:

God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of it. (Acts 2:32)

The new message those first Christians proclaimed has its center the resurrection of Jesus. That was – and is -- the final proof that God is in control. To those Christians the resurrection was all important.

We must remember that

Without the resurrection there would be no Christian church!

When the disciples preached about the importance of the resurrection, they were preaching from experience.

- After Good Friday, they were bewildered, broken people. Their dreams were shattered. Their lives were in turmoil.
- It was the resurrection that changed all that.

The resurrection turned men who were cowards into bold preachers of the faith.

- It took a Peter who three times denied Jesus, and turned into Peter the Rock.
- It took a doubting Thomas and transformed him into a great missionary of the faith.
- Most of these men would die horrible deaths themselves because of their faith, but they never once denied it or turned their backs on it.

But get this ... the resurrection isn't a one day event. Jesus is still risen. We could just as easily – and maybe we should – start every conversation with "Christ is risen." He is still risen!

There was a song that my home church would sing ever Easter. It goes like this:

I serve a risen Savior. He's in the world today.
I know that He is living, whatever men may say.
I see His hand of mercy. I hear His voice of cheer.
And just the time I need Him, He's always near.

He lives! He lives! Christ Jesus lives today.
He walks with me and talks with me
Along life's narrow way.
He lives! He lives! Salvation to impart.
You ask me how I know He lives?
He lives within my heart!

APPLICATION

So these first Christians launched out with a new message:

- The cross was the deliberate plan of God
- Jesus is the fulfillment of every Messianic prophecy

- And He is risen, and lives today.

The fascinating of this new message those first Christians proclaimed is that it wasn't really new. It is the same message that has been proclaimed in the Scriptures from the very beginning.

- God loves us, and will use every possible means to make it possible for us to know His love ... even a cross
- God's promises are always true ... they are always fulfilled
- God is with us even now. He never leaves us or forsakes us.

And we proclaim it!

Amen