

A New Passion Acts 2:36-41

INTRODUCTION

As I did last week, I want to begin this message by introducing you to one of our sister congregations in the North American Lutheran Church. This will be my practice for as long as 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 Faith Landing Lutheran Church in Grand Blanc, MI, a suburb of Flint, MI.

- They meet each week at 6:30 p.m. in a conference room at the Best Western Inn in nearby Lapeer, MI.
- They are only about two years old and were formed as a middle ground to both the growing liberalism in some churches and the growing conservatism in others.
- They do not have a pastor but occasionally use the services of a retired pastor nearby. His name is George Zornow.
- A lay person by the name of Dave Bartels is their primary contact.
- Each week they set up and tear down their very limited worship space, using homes for other activities.
- They are strong supporters of the NALC's Disaster relief efforts.

As we worship in this temporary space, we want to faithfully pray for our brothers and sisters in Christ for whom what we think of as "temporary" is for them "normal."

We do this, of course, because of our own temporary location, but there are other reasons as well.

First we are reminded that part of our reality as followers of God is that we need to approach life with a mindset that says "temporary" is "normal."

The Apostle Paul reminded us:

But our citizenship is in heaven. (Philippians 3:20)

The old Gospel hymn tells us:

This world is not my home, I'm just passing through
My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue
The angels beckon me from Heaven's open door
And I can't feel at home in this world anymore.

Second, when the children of Israel left Egypt, their worship center was a tent – the Tent of Meeting (or the Tabernacle).

And **third** as the first Christians began to understand the reality of the resurrection on Easter Sunday, they increasingly moved away from the Temple – their “permanent” location – to worship in the homes of other Christians – a “temporary” location.

Today's message picks up where last week's message concluded. It is the Day of Pentecost. Earlier in this second chapter, the Holy Spirit had descended and with that new power they took to the streets to proclaim the message of Jesus.

Last week we talked about the content of that message ... about how ...

- The cross of Christ was part of God's plan from before time.
- Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies about the Messiah, and how no one else could.
- And how Christ still lives and reigns in our world today.

Today I want you to hear and feel the NEW PASSION they had as they proclaimed that new message. Never forget these proclaimers were ordinary people – fishermen, political activists, tax collectors and the like. There was absolutely nothing special about them – no formal schooling, no natural talents, no religious pedigree. ‘

Their parents never put bumper stickers on the back of their donkeys proclaiming “My kid is an honor student at Temple school.”

In fact, observers in the Scriptures thought they were pretty average. Look at this verse:

When they saw ... they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus. (Acts 4:13)

They had been with Jesus. That was their number one qualification for the content of the message they proclaimed. But what astonished those onlookers was the passion with which they proclaimed it.

- The disciples looked ordinary, sounded ordinary, dressed ordinary.
- But my oh my were they passionate!

Look at the passion words in this one verse alone:

With many other words (Peter) **warned** them; and he **pleaded** with them, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.” (Acts 2:40)

Passion is not something that can be manufactured on the spur of the moment. It has to be birthed deep inside you. Something happens to you, in you, and passion results.

Their passion came from three sources. The proclaimers and their audience ...

SOURCE #1: THEY FULLY UNDERSTOOD THE CROSS WAS FOR THEM

Look at verses 36-37:

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah." When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:36-37)

For the last two years, our Good Friday service has included a time where each of us can hammer a nail into a cross. Our goal in that experience is to grasp way down at gut level that Jesus died FOR ME. It was my sin that put Him there.

- Each time I have done it, I picture His eyes looking directly at me as I raise the hammer. And I imagine Him saying, "Father, forgive him."

There is an old missionary story about a gospel presentation in an African village. Using lantern slides (because there was no electricity), images of the story were projected onto the white-washed wall of the meeting house.

When the crucifixion was projected, one man rose from the audience and ran forward and through himself onto the projected image. As he did, he was crying, "Come down from the cross, Son of God. I, not you, should be hanging there."

That's the beauty of Romans 5:8:

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. (Romans 5:8)

If we understand what Christ has done there, it should strike every one of us to the heart. And when we absolutely know that the cross was God's plan to bring us back to Him – and that such is His desire for everyone in the world – PASSION builds!

SOURCE #2: THEY GENUINELY REPENTED OF THEIR SIN

The passionate message those first believers proclaimed hit the mark. The first hearers cried out:

When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, "Brothers, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37)

Peter was quick to respond:

Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins. (Acts 2:38a)

An elderly woman had just returned to her home from a church service when she was startled by an intruder. She caught the man in the act of robbing her home of its valuables, she yelled, "Stop--Acts 2:38!"

The burglar stopped dead in his tracks and stood very still with his hands in the air. The woman calmly called the police and explained what she had done. As the officer cuffed the man to take him in, he asked the burglar, "Why did you just stand there? All the old lady did was doing was yell a Scripture verse to you."

"Scripture?" replied the burglar, "I thought she said she had an AXE and two 38's!"

Repentance is both a change of mind and a change of heart. The passionate message proclaimed to them "cut them" deeply and brought about a change of mind and a change of heart.

And the text says that 3,000 did exactly that!

Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day. (Acts 2:41)

SOURCE #3: THEY WERE FILLED WITH THE HOLY SPIRIT

The second half of verse 38 tells us that when we repent and become a part of God's family ...

And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. (Acts 2:38b)

We will talk more about this on Pentecost Sunday (May 28), but for now here is what we need to understand.

- None of us can live the kind of life those first proclaimers described under our own power.
- We are not smart enough, quick-witted enough or strong enough to do it.
- And if we try to do it on our own, we will soon grow discouraged and indifferent.
- Christianity will become nothing more than any other religion, and we will soon conclude that every religion is pretty much the same ... so it doesn't matter what you follow.

But if turn to follow Christ, repent of your sins and become a part of His family, you receive the Holy Spirit. And the Spirit makes all this possible.

Let me describe it by sharing this true story:

Ludwig Nommensen was a German Lutheran missionary to Batak Lands in North Sumatra in Indonesia. There he translated the New Testament into the native Batak language. He would also become the first Bishop of the Batak Christian Protestant Church.

- Historians consider Nommensen to be of the greatest missionaries of all time.
- So much so that he is commemorated as a missionary every November 7th in the Calendar of Saints of the Lutheran Church.

When he arrived at his post to begin mission work, the village chief welcomed Ludwig and told him, "For two years you must learn our customs and convince us you have a message worth hearing."

After two years, the tribal leader called him before him to ask the missionary how Christianity differed from the moral rules and traditions of the tribe. The chief said, "We already know what is right. We have many laws that say we must not steal, or take our neighbor's wives, or tell lies."

Nommensen replied, "That's true. But my God supplies the power needed to keep those laws."

The chief was startled. "Can you really teach my people to live better?"

"No, I can't," responded the missionary. "But if your people will receive Jesus Christ, God will give them the strength to do what is right."

The chief invited him to stay another six months, during which time he was allowed to preach the gospel and teach villagers how the Holy Spirit works in the lives of Christians.

When those six months were up, the chief announced: "You can stay as long as you want. Your religion is better than ours, for your God walks with men and gives them strength to do the things He requires."

APPLICATION

When we share the good news of Jesus with people who need to hear it, they might well disagree with it.

- They might think it is narrow or out of touch with current trends.
- They might know some people who act a bit hypocritical
- They might even think you are an "ordinary" person.

But when the Good News of Jesus Christ has touched us and saved us, we are filled with a conviction – a passion – that what we have to say needs to be said.

- And it needs to be heard.
- And it needs to be received.

And so we share with others what God has done for us.

Amen