

April 8, 2018 Witnesses of the Fact Acts 2:25-32

I am sure there are ministers in our denominational family who would say the reading for today would be more appropriate 50 days after our celebration of Easter. The Sunday of Pentecost. Certainly, in Luke's second great document, the reading and the crucial phrase I have lighted upon is part of the history of Pentecost, and its first celebration in a Christian context. I have chosen the reading for this morning specifically because it runs so contrary to current attitudes concerning the church, the Christian faith, and Jesus Christ.

At this point in time, in history, there is a terrible tendency to drum God out of the picture. Belief and being a believer is in current North American culture something foolish people do. The church is reduced to the stature of an organization like any other. The details of the Christian faith are often treated as the political decisions of Church Councils centuries after the presumed time of Christ. Explanations are man centered and even within the church are capable of leaving the impression that God the Lord, the Almighty, strong to save was not really involved....because you cannot prove HE was. And is. And is to come.

To me language is very important. It is not only what we say, but the way we say it that has lasting significance. I as one who believes, simply want you to know that the early church, 50 days after the resurrection of Jesus Christ, thought of that event in specific terms. Used specific words to describe

what had happened. People like James and John, Peter and Matthew, Mark and Luke proceeded literally to put their lives on the line to tell the world and a hostile world at that, a hostile Empire, that things occurred in Jerusalem which would still be not only talked about but believed, the focus of plans and lives 21 centuries later...or until Jesus comes again in the wonderful timing of God's choice.

So here is the critically important verse. Acts chapter 2, verse 32. Peter is addressing a crowd. It is not a little crowd of 40 or 50 souls. It is a large crowd. More than 3,000 people. And they are not disciples of Jesus. They are Jews from all over the Roman Empire. They are derisive of the disciples of Jesus, Peter and the lot. Some were interested and prepared to listen but the assessment of the testimony of Peter and the other disciples is, "they have had too much wine." They are out of their minds. They are high. They are drunk. What Peter ends up saying to this crowd in reply is, "God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of this fact." There are three things in that 32<sup>nd</sup> verse of Acts 2 that I want to underline with you this morning as we worship in the light, not the shadow, but the light of Easter a week ago.

First. "God has raised this Jesus to life." I am not taking those words out of context, I am putting them in their historical and real life, real world context. That is what Peter was trying to do. He wanted people to know that he was not drunk and he was not nuts. He tried to think of his own safety first. He

tried to go back to fishing, and the quiet life. But things have happened. He cannot and will not deny what he has seen. And like Martin Luther at the time of the reformation, here Peter stands unable to do anything else!! Those who have the manuscript in their hands will tell you that sentence ends with 2 exclamation points. That's not following the rules of accurate punctuation. It does send a message and the message is, I get emotional about this...not irrational, emotional. It means a lot to me. I have invested my life in these words...God has raised this Jesus to life. As have you. As have you!

Here is another fact. It always surprises me that thinking people, brilliant people will fail to get this point. Like Mark the gospel writer, I got it as a teenager. Like Peter it made so much sense to me as an adult, I committed my life to the cause. (By the way I am not claiming to be as important a person as Peter was.) But no one will understand what these words mean, until he or she is willing to take God seriously. God, the Creator, has raised Jesus to life. This is not about what mankind can do...but what God did.

Last Sunday I said our service was an anniversary of the Sunday on which the resurrection occurred. And that being the case, every Sunday is an anniversary of God's rolling the stone away and breathing the breath of life into the dead body of Jesus. Not only to save the world, but to change the world. To change us from what we would otherwise be. To change us into servants and care givers. To change us into people who claim

the name of Jesus and pour a degree of love into experience that otherwise would not be there. And we do this because we have collided with the truth that God is, and God does. He is personally involved. "God has raised this Jesus to life."

"And we are all witnesses." You know what a witness is, a person who has seen and heard things, who was there, and saw things unfold firsthand. And no, we cannot transport ourselves in a time machine of our own construction back to the time of the crucifixion, hiding behind the rocks to actually see stone roll away and Jesus walking out. But everyone of us has had an experience or a bouquet of experiences, that we cannot explain except to talk about God's being real and with us in specific circumstances. That is why we adhere to the Biblical accounts. The writers speak the language of our experience. We find the ring of truth in the stories about the Holy Spirit, the promises concerning Jesus coming and coming again, we have walked with God. More accurately, God has walked with us. We accept the witness of others because they impress us with the rationality of their faith experiences.

There is a song, "Jesus got a hold of my life...and HE won't let me go. Jesus came into my heart, HE came into my soul." I am witness to that reality. Peter in Acts speaks in language that is meaningful to me. I can't deny it. And I won't deny it. And it has nothing to do with being too old to change. Walking with Jesus is a lifetime of discovering the need to change. So I say with Peter "we are all witnesses."

So first was...I take God seriously, and therefore the resurrection of Jesus makes sense to me. Secondly we are witnesses of the miracles of God. And that includes the reality that the living Christ...Jesus...has not only redeemed me, but has made a claim on my life that I...like Peter find it necessary to embrace.

Third point. The fact. Those two words signify that there is one most important fact in a universe of facts. The fact is the most important one. The fact is that God raised this Jesus of the Gospels and the prophecies, this Jesus of the Scriptures to life, as the sun broke over the horizon in Jerusalem, on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day following his death on the cross. A death that led to HIS being laid in the tomb. And the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea could not hold HIM. The resurrection is “the fact” because it alone explains the emergence, the growth and the ministry of the Church of Jesus Christ. That one fact alone explains why orphanages exist, and why widows are cared for to the degree they are cared for in a harsh world. That one fact explains how hospitals and hospices come into being. That one fact explains how universal education becomes a value and universities come into being. I wear this cross, and these doctor’s bars in honour of “the fact” ... God raised this Jesus to life, and we (and I) are all witnesses to the fact.

It is true. Easter was last week. But this is also true. The light of that one Sunday’s occurrence in the unfolding will of Almighty God, is the light that makes every Sunday’s worship

experience meaningful. We are witnesses to that singular, wonderful fact. God has raised this Jesus to life.

Let us pray;

Lord our God, may the fact of your raising Jesus from the dead always be the fact that casts light into the shadows among which we live in this world. May the raising up of Jesus cast hope across our experience as we age and cope with the realities of our mortality. As a result of the resurrection of Jesus may the ring of triumphant joy be loosed in our souls as we deal with the loss of loved ones, and experience tragedy in the midst of every day life. Be with us to empower our faith to seek to serve others in their time of need, regardless of what we are tempted to think is more important. In Jesus name we ask these things. Amen