

April 19, 2020 We Are Witnesses Pt. 1 Acts 2:29-36

My dear, dear friends! You do know how hard I find it to celebrate Easter, the resurrection of Jesus, and then just turn the page to other business. This Sunday I am following a personal tradition of lingering over the facts of Jesus being risen on the 3rd day. And I will come back to that in a moment.

Some of us have managed to talk on the phone. I want to thank you for expressions of appreciation for everything from a commitment to remember one another in prayer, to sharing stories about baking bread (and eating it), to the things we are doing to stay alive in remaining in our homes. I walk in my basement, and 2 or 3 times a day I walk with Gambler, our black and white French bulldog cross. I broke a significant barrier this week in making it to a total of 20,000 steps. That is the easiest way for me to tell you that Barbara and I are doing well. We are healthy. And I have been hearing from Glenn Bennett that many of you are mailing in, or delivering to his mail box, your support of the Church in these times when we cannot physically gather. I thank you for doing that. I have both given my offerings to him and delivered cheques on behalf of others. Again I say thank you. I also have an announcement to share with you. I have been negotiating with Rebekah. We have begun to plan to do a second service together which some of you will be able to view, as you did the communion service we did jointly on Maundy Thursday. This service will be for Mother's Day in May. I will keep you informed as plans blossom and bear fruit.

This morning's message is based on the reading from Acts 2, verses 29 to 36. If you turn in your Bibles to this lesson you will notice that it is part of Peter's message to the crowd of people at the time of Pentecost. Pentecost was the Jewish festival celebrated 50 days after the second day of Passover. In other words what we are told here in Acts 2 happened approximately 50 days after the Passion and resurrection of Jesus. A lot has happened. But what we get to see in this portion of Peter's address, is the affect of what has happened on Peter, and the effect of what he had to say to the crowd. It is estimated 3000 people came to faith in Jesus as a result of the demonstration of the Holy Spirit.

So what did Peter say? Here is where he begins. Peter is standing before this crowd in Jerusalem. And what he says is that he can confidently report that King David died and was buried in this holy city, (and indeed it is). I count it a singular blessing that I was able, not once but twice, to be in that city and walk where Jesus walked and pray where Jesus prayed. But Peter is reminding the crowd of something very basic. Something that is in our face every day of this 2020 plague of Covid-19. It is a natural occurrence that people die. King David died and was buried in that city of Jerusalem. His burial site can be visited. The implication is that his bones are there. "To this day!"

Do not for a moment think that I mean to say it is easy to lose a loved one or a friend. As you all know I lost a

dear brother in Christ in Punta Cana. And that grief breaks my heart. I know his loved ones bear a grief that is more intense than mine. But all of that said, it is part of the normal course of life. People are born. They live. They die. We are mortal, and at a time of God's choosing our days on earth, (yours and mine) come to an end. In a time of God's choosing we return to the earth, and become the dust from which we were created. But praise God, that is not the whole story.

Peter has learned a lot from following Jesus and being taught by Him. The way of faith in God who is Father and Son and Holy Spirit, three in one and one in three. And the Trinitarian formula is not so marvelous as we tend to think. I am a husband, a father to my children, and a minister to my flock. My wife does not put me on a pedestal as you tend to do. My children remind me that I am only a man labouring with and within limitations all the time.

One of the things Peter has learned is that David the King, was not only a King. He was also a husband and a father. And he was a prophet. He knew that one of the promises God had made to him, was that one of his descendants would sit on the throne. "And seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, (the anointed One, the Messiah), that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay." This is Peter's declaration that the prophecy of David has been fulfilled in Jesus' being raised on the 3rd day. When did David say all of this?

Dear King David! Writer of the Psalms. It is no wonder that that Book of the Bible is often referred to as the HYMN Book in the Biblical collection. The Songs of David! Read Psalm 16, and especially verses 8-11. Peter has borrowed the language of the King to talk about the resurrection of the King of Kings. And Peter had reason to celebrate. With the other disciples and the 120 in the upper room, he saw the risen Christ...not a vision...Jesus raised from the dead on that Sunday evening, the 3rd day. HIS body was not reduced to dust. Nor was Jesus limping along as one suffering from the visible wounds in HIS body. HE was vigorous and alive. HE spoke with them. HE admonished them. In Galilee HE ate with them.

Peter tells the crowd confidently, not apologetically, confidently and victoriously that “God raised this Jesus to life!” And then almost as an after thought Peter says, “We are all witnesses of the fact.” Peter is saying don’t believe me as a solitary witness, talk to Andrew and James and John and the rest. You know who we are. We followed Jesus down these streets and listened to HIM as HE taught on the steps of the Temple. Well, as surely as you can touch those Temple steps, we witnessed, all 120 of us, the fact that Jesus is risen.

Some of you will remember the television show Dragnet. The detective Joe Friday always wanted the facts...just the facts...I love it that Peter uses that word “we are all witnesses of the fact of the resurrection of Jesus. And there is a sense in which the same can and should be said by us. We have been with the Lord, or rather HE has been with us. We have

experienced what my daughter Rev. Rebekah calls, “the God moment,” moments when we know we are standing in the presence of God. I have cheated death at least 3 times in the last 5 years. And be clear about this, what I mean is not I but Christ in me. Each time I have testified that the Lord has more for me to do. That is why we are still together even in this time when we cannot stand in the same room or be within 6 feet of each other.

And when this plague is over, because it will come to an end, when we do stand together in a single room, what will we do? We will sing hymns and choruses of praise giving thanks for the deliverance that we have once again experienced at the hand of a gracious God who loves us and has more things for us to accomplish in HIS high and holy name. For here is the truth: we are not simply gripped by a world wide plague, we are held in the saving and gracious embrace of one who calls us to follow HIM, to love our neighbours in HIS name, to pray for the sick and the dying in the joy and power of HIS HOLY Spirit.

Peter ends this portion of his address by reminding people that Jesus was exalted to the right hand of God the Father. He received the Holy Spirit of the living God. And HE did not keep it to HIMSELF as people might hoard money or diamonds or toilet paper! HE poured out the Spirit of Life such that we see the things we see that affirm our faith is real, and miracles are facts, as solid as the steps of the Jerusalem Temple.

The portion ends with Peter's affirmation that the ONE we crucified, and that is also a fact, our sins, yours and mine drove the nails that pinned Jesus to the cross. Mel Gibson has a lot of failings but when interviewed by Barbara Walters over the making of the film, "The Passion of Christ" she asked him, "Who killed Jesus?" She expected him to say, "the Jews did it!" She confessed she was surprised when he responded, "I did." It is a Biblically sound response. Especially if we acknowledge as Peter did that God made this Jesus, "both Lord and Christ." Surely that is another way of saying both Lord (God) and Saviour.

Please pray for the end of this current plague. And pray for those who stand on the front lines battling it. I heard an expert being interviewed on radio who said, "You know, a month ago we barely knew this virus existed. We have learned a great deal in the past month." I pray we have learned a new respect for the privilege of life and life eternal. In Jesus we have the privilege of knowing we have received both as grace gifts from the God who redeems. God bless you.

Let us pray;

Lord in the last 4 weeks we have learned and seen things we did not hope to experience. We pray for families and households who are dealing with loss. Every life lost was precious to a circle of family and friends. Grant strength and hope to those who remain behind, and who struggle to cope. We pray for those who work every day, in hospitals and long

term care homes, to preserve life and ease suffering. We pray for those who this very day will lose their struggle with Covid-19. Grant those doing research insight that may hasten the day when we have a vaccine. And grant us as we wrestle with our own problems the gift of sight, that no matter what happens we are in your hands and therefore we are safe. In Jesus name we pray. Amen