

St. Luke's Evangelical Lutheran Church – Watertown, WI
Pastor Mark Gartner
Sermon for Easter 2 – March 31st and April 3rd, 2008

Acts 2:14, 22-32

Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. ²³This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. ²⁴But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. ²⁵David said about him:

“I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.’

“Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. ³⁰But he was a prophet and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. ³¹Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. ³²God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.

Dear Children of God,

I enjoy the study of ancient history. One of the things that always seems to amaze me is how much we know about the people and nations from times so long ago. From very early on in the time of this world, we have people recording for us in sometimes the most unusual and simple ways the history of the things that have happened in this world. There has always been people who have taken the time to make sure that things are recorded.

As we sit here some 2000 years after the first Easter morning, it still never ceases to amaze me that God has given us such a sure foundation on which we can build our faith. We have the written word of God that has been given to us from God himself which tells us that Jesus’ death and resurrection is true. The whole Bible from the Old Testament have been filled with this message. It is this message that is going to direct us as we look at the theme:

Theme: The Resurrection Is A Unique Message

- 1. The prophets foretold it**
- 2. Jesus rose and fulfilled it**
- 3. The disciples proclaimed it**

Although this text is a portion of Peter’s Pentecost sermon, the context of the first two chapters of Acts makes it clear why it is an appropriate text for the Sunday after Easter. Jesus’ disciples had witnessed his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. He had commissioned them to spread the news of repentance and forgiveness of sins to all the world. But not until the Holy Spirit came to them on the first Pentecost did they possess the boldness to proclaim God’s life-giving message to their hearers. This particular portion of Peter’s sermon focuses on the heart of that message—the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and its effects for those who believe.

“Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd.” The first portion of chapter 2 identifies the crowd as the Jews who had gathered in Jerusalem from all over the world for the celebration of the Old Testament Pentecost, or Feast of Weeks. While they were there, this crowd observed the incredible phenomenon of the New Testament Pentecost. They saw what happened when the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus’ disciples in the form of tongues of fire. In his wisdom God gave these disciples, who were mostly uneducated men, the power to share the gospel with all who were present in a language that each could understand.

As usual Peter took the role of spokesperson for the group. But what a remarkable change! Just seven weeks earlier, the same man was too afraid to admit even to a servant girl that he knew Jesus. His companions had joined him behind locked doors for fear of what the Jewish leaders might do to them. But the Holy Spirit filled them not only with the ability to speak in other languages, but with the courage to speak publicly about Jesus and what he had done. The Greek verb used for “addressed” indicates a dignified and exalted tone of discourse, the kind of speech one might expect to hear from a prophet or philosopher. But on this day an ordinary fisherman, without any specific study or preparation, preached a masterful sermon that cut to the heart of his hearers and led them to repentance and faith. Clearly the Holy Spirit was at work!

“Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know.” Peter addresses his fellow Jews with a title of honor and respect, recalling their connection to the patriarch Jacob. They were the people of the covenant through whom God sent his promised Messiah. Peter pleads with them to listen to what he has to say by God’s own command. When he refers to Jesus, Peter calls him by the name people would have used when speaking to him—Jesus, the one from Nazareth. His human nature was evident to all as they observed him personally or heard about his activities.

But Jesus of Nazareth was a special man, one whose works clearly demonstrated his intimate connection with the God of the universe. New Testament writers often use the three terms *miracles*, *wonders*, and *signs* to indicate the divine nature of the one who was able to perform them. Peter points out that God did these things through Jesus. This Jesus of Nazareth accomplished them “among you,” or “in your midst,” as they knew very well. No honest Jew could deny what Jesus had done, proving his divine power and authority.

“This man was handed over to you by God’s set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross.” What happened to Jesus could have been prevented. God could have altered the history of the passion by his power. But his love for all the world would not permit it. God’s gracious plan of saving all people from sin, death, and hell included Judas’ betrayal of Jesus into the hands of the Jewish authorities. This did not absolve them or anyone else of personal guilt regarding the unfair and inhuman treatment Jesus received. But it demonstrated God’s great wisdom in using even the wicked acts of his creatures to accomplish his predetermined plan.

The pointed preaching of the law comes across in the NIV translation: **“and you . . . put him to death.”** They used the help of the Roman authorities, the “wicked men,” but they bore the responsibility for Jesus’ crucifixion. The Greek verbs used here paint a vivid word picture that must have penetrated the heart of anyone who had witnessed the gory scene at Calvary. You fastened him to the cross, and you lifted him up and did away with him. These words flooded many of Peter’s hearers with the sights and sounds of the crucifixion. As the Holy Spirit worked through the message, many of them were **“cut to the heart”** (v. 37).

“But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was

impossible for death to keep its hold on him.” The law did its work of exposing sin and guilt. Now the gospel sounded sweet and soothing. Here is the heart of Peter’s message on Pentecost. Here is the heart of all the sermons the apostles preached after Easter. And here is the heart of God’s message today. God’s predetermined plan included Jesus’ resurrection from the dead. Peter says God raised him from the dead. Nothing could prevent God from accomplishing his purpose. God freed Jesus from the agony of death, or perhaps from the cords or snares of death, alluding to Psalm 18:4,5; 116:3; and 2 Samuel 22:6. Death was unable to master or control the one who called himself the Resurrection and the Life. His victory over death gives us the certainty that we will enjoy that victory as well, as he told his disciples, **“Because I live, you also will live” (Jn 14:19).**

“David said about him: I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken. Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope.” Peter, addressing Jews who knew and accepted the Old Testament, quotes their beloved ancestor David. Using Psalm 16:8-11, he shows them that the resurrection had always been part of God’s plan. The second person of the Trinity is speaking through the prophet in these words, as Peter notes in his following discourse. How much David fully understood about the details of this prophecy is a matter of speculation, but God certainly used these words both to prophesy Christ’s own resurrection and to fill David with the confidence he described.

God fills our hearts with that kind of strength and confidence as we gaze into the empty tomb by faith. Our tongues can rejoice. We can live in hope, the sure hope of the resurrection of our bodies from the grave. The original Hebrew words picture living in a tent. The hope of the resurrection enables us to view our lives here as temporary— we camp here on our way to the permanent home of eternal life in heaven.

“Because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.” Christ knew, and he shares with us his knowledge, that his Father would not abandon him to the grave. On the cross he was abandoned, as he suffered the torments of hell for sinners. But he would not be left to decay in the ground. His Father, who accepted his perfect suffering and death as payment in full for the sins of the world, would bring him back to life. Christ knew the resurrection awaited him. He told his disciples of it before it occurred (Mt 20:17-19). Jesus made known to his disciples and to all the world that the resurrection is the path to life, and by faith in the empty tomb, our entire approach to our existence is changed. Believers conduct their lives in the hope and joy of life eternal, which only the resurrection of Jesus can give. Every believer longs to reach the life hereafter but now rejoices in having life and walking in hope and joy of life. The ultimate goal is the fullness of joy that we will experience in God’s presence in heaven.

“Brothers, 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 and knew that God had promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne.” Although Peter preached the law pointedly, he did not use a condescending tone. He included himself as one of their brothers, a thought that invited them to relate to what he was saying. Clearly David was not talking for himself Christ was speaking through him. All the Jews had to acknowledge that David was dead and buried, since his grave was in their home country. But as a spokesman for God, David was given insight into the future. He had God’s promise of a descendant to rule on his throne over a kingdom that would not end.

“Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay.” This is the promise David knew and had heard from God. Although the Messiah would give up his life as a sacrifice for sin, he would not be left to rot in the grave. His Father would raise his body from the dead, a sure sign to all witnesses that he had indeed earned the

victory over all God's opponents. What David saw in prophecy, Peter and the other disciples saw in fulfillment. The resurrection of the Christ makes Christianity unique compared to any other religion of the world. All other self-proclaimed saviors or messiahs die, and their bodies decay. Only the true Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, was able to die and then rise again. And his death and resurrection have established peace between God and us.

“God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.” “This Jesus” is placed first in emphatic position. This Jesus who had been killed, God raised to life. Here is the heart, once again, of the apostle's sermon. The resurrection is a historical fact, something that could not be changed or undone. Peter, recalling what Jesus had told the disciples before his ascension (Ac 1:8), simply states, **“And we are all witnesses.”** This statement acknowledges the mission Jesus gave them, and it shows that they recognized their purpose for living and working. Jesus' words about being his witnesses were not a request or an offer. He declared that they had a job to do. Whether they liked it or not and whether they were good at it or not, they were his witnesses. So also today we who have learned to know Jesus as our personal Lord and Savior, who have been called to faith through the gospel, now have a purpose in life. We are his witnesses—witnesses of the fact that Jesus has died and risen again—and therefore repentance and forgiveness of sins can be preached to all the world. Amen