**Acts 10:34a,36,39-43** April 19, 2020

Pastor P. Martin **Faith Lutheran Church, Radcliff, KY** Easter 2

*Acts 10:34Then Peter began to speak…36“You know the message God sent to the people of Israel, telling the good news of peace through Jesus Christ, who is Lord of all… 39We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, 40but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. 41He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. 42He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. 43All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”*

Dear Friends in Christ,

**Witnesses Talk**

Yes, they do. An acquaintance recently shared that he grew up in a family of seven children. If something went wrong, if you broke something, he had to be careful, because witnesses talk. All seven kids had to have the story well-rehearsed before mom and dad found out, because if any one of the seven let something slip, it was all over.

Witnesses talk. Chuck Colson is a name that may sound vaguely familiar to some. He was President Richard Nixon’s self-styled “hatchet man.” He was involved in the Watergate scandal and was the first to do time for the illegal activity of that scandal. In his own words he said that “Watergate embroiled 12 of the most powerful men in the world—and they couldn't keep a lie for three weeks.” Witnesses talk.

In 1998 in a little known African country, the nation’s recently fired finance minister was about to go to court. No one knew what he was going to say in court, or even exactly why he was going to court. But people were sure he was about to do something heroic for the nation: that he would blow the whistle on rampant government corruption. Hours before he was to appear in court, he was murdered. Everyone knew why he was murdered: because witnesses talk.

Witnesses see things, and they talk about them. We can’t hold it in. Sometimes the child comes running in the door, “Mom, do you know what I just saw?” Sometimes only in old age do people finally speak about what they saw nearly a lifetime ago, but witnesses talk. You should see how glad they are to finally get it off their chest. Things matter, and we can’t really understand—I mean, not really deep-down understand—the wonderful and the terrible until we have shared them with someone. More than understand, we also want people to learn, to be wiser for what we saw.

**I. WE Are His Witnesses**

The weeks after Easter are full of it. Last week we celebrated the resurrection of Jesus Christ. He rose from the dead! He didn’t just go to that land from which no one returns. He returned and rose and conquered death and he appeared to hundreds of his followers. They witnessed it! They saw him at the tomb, on the road to Emmaus, on a hillside in Galilee, on a lakeshore in Galilee, and in our Gospel reading today in a locked room in Jerusalem. They saw him, but that wasn’t they end of it. Because they had witnessed it, they talked.

The fifth book of the New Testament, Acts, follows right on the heels of Jesus’ time on earth. In outline form, it follows the early Christian Church through the first generation after Jesus ascended into heaven. In every chapter of Acts eyewitnesses of Jesus’ testify. Our reading this morning is some of that eye-witness testimony.

That is what makes it a good reading for the Sunday after Easter. Easter is the joy of Jesus raised. Easter is wide-eyed people with hands to their mouths in wonder. Easter is the joy of the happiest thing that you thought could never happen. On Easter we sit in that joy and soak up the sunshine.

The week after is where we start to ask the question, “Now what?” Now that we have seen all our Savior did for us in dying for us, now that he has assured us that death in Jesus leads to unbelievable life, now what?

Witnesses talk. ***“Then Peter began to speak…”*** begins our reading.

Wait! Why is he speaking? To whom? Good questions we must answer.

Peter is speaking to Cornelius, which really doesn’t tell us much. Peter was raised as an observant Jew and followed Jesus for his entire ministry. Cornelius is a non-commissioned officer in the Roman army, maybe an E-8 or E-9, who had somehow come to know the Jewish faith and to some degree follow it. Peter had known the prophecies, the rituals, the faith from the inside, from birth. Cornelius only knew them from the outside, as a mid-life convert. Peter the insider saw the connections between the Old Testament and Jesus. Cornelius, the outsider, was wondering why all this wrangling in the Jewish community about this Jesus of Nazareth. So how do you get Peter and Cornelius onto the same page? How do you connect the two?

Well, I might imagine that God would send an angel. That would be easy. Just have an angel from heaven tell Cornelius, and then you don’t have to bridge the racial divide. Send an angel with the message and you don’t have to bridge the gap between Cornelius the occupying soldier, and Peter the subjugated Jew. My advice to God would be to follow the Christmas plan. Send an angel proclaiming: *“Peace on earth; good will toward men.”* Angels are impressive. An angel doesn’t stick his foot in his mouth like the people do, or for that matter your own pastor sometimes does. Angels don’t forget important announcements. My vote for sending the gospel out into the world is for angels.

God didn’t. And here is the even greater irony: God did send an angel to Cornelius but wouldn’t let that angel speak a peep about the Gospel! Let me explain. (By the way, after our worship service, you might just want open up your Bibles and read all of chapter ten so that you can contemplate this wonder!) In the beginning of chapter 10, God *did* send an angel to Cornelius. But that angel *did not* tell Cornelius the Gospel. The angel’s message was simply this, *“Send men to [the city of] Joppa to bring back a man named Simon who is called Peter.”* (4-5). Do you understand what is going on here? God refuses to let the angel carry the saving message of the Gospel. God has reserved the privilege of sharing the Gospel for fallen, sinful, weak-willed human beings. I would have chosen an angel. God chose us.

***“Then Peter began to speak…”***

**II. What This Witness Talks About**

If you enjoy courtroom drama shows, you know how important witnesses are, at least in the world that Hollywood creates. Witnesses make or break the case. Sometimes a certain witness is called a “star witness.” A star witness knows something important that no-one else knows, is willing to say it, and says it in a coherent and convincing way.

The Apostle Peter is God’s star witness. He is so great that before he arrives, God sends an angel in front of him to announce his arrival. Three days later, Cornelius is looking at the clock and pacing the floor. He has the coffee on and a dozen doughnuts on the table. And he has questions in his head. What is God’s witness is going to tell me? What does this whole Christian thing mean?

If you are watching today and are wondering when it comes right down to it, what it means to be a Christian, Peter, the eye-witness of the risen Christ, tells us here. And it isn’t what we naturally expect.

We naturally expect the definition of a Christian to be laid out in terms of what we are supposed to do. When Jesus walked the earth, crowds asked him, *“What must we do to do the works God requires?”* Do you remember Jesus’ response? *“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”* (John 6:28-29). Years later a thousand miles away another man asked Paul of Tarsus, *“What must I do to be saved?”* Do you remember the answer? *“Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved”* (Acts 16:30-31). Peter comes to Cornelius, and while Cornelius never asked the question (or at least it isn’t recorded), the critical question for Cornelius would have naturally been, “What should I do to be right with God?” It is the most natural question in the world.

Well, what does Jesus’ witness say? Peter never mentions a word about what Cornelius is supposed to do. (Now, this is not to say that what we do is unimportant. But the good things Christians do is because they are Christians, not to make them Christians.) Peter doesn’t tell Cornelius to be more honest, caring, tolerant or happy. He doesn’t tell him to cut out his bad habits. God’s witness doesn’t slap an 80 pound rucksack of rules on Cornelius’ back and tell him, “You want to please God? Have at it!” Peter had eaten and drunk with Jesus, both before and after his death, and now Peter only speaks ***“the good news of peace through Jesus Christ.”*** The message isn’t about us rising above our human fallenness. It is about God descending to us. It is one-sided reconciliation. One side does all the work, pays all the outstanding debts, forgives the past wrongs, forgets all the angry words and spiteful deeds. It is complete and total reconciliation that leads to peace between us and God, done all by God.

“But Sir,” Cornelius objects to Peter, “I’m a soldier. Tell me the truth; I can take it. What do I have to do?” “Cornelius, all I have to say is ***Peace through Jesus Christ.”***

What a sweet word: peace! Peace is a slogan that the idealistic love—and why not? Its thought is beautiful. The realistic scoff at peace—not because they don’t want it but because they know we humans are incapable of it. Peace is the Garden of Eden where God placed us, and the heaven that Christ won for us. Peace is what angels sang to shepherds when Christ entered human history. Peace, not of our achievement, but ***“through Jesus Christ… Everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”***

Peter proclaimed this truth authentically because he had not only seen Christ’s life, but he had also felt deep in his heart the peace that only Christ can give. Peter was Jesus’ star student. As Jesus had neared death, he had warned that Peter would deny him, Christ. Peter insisted loudly, *“Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you.”* He spoke with such bravado that all the other men in the room raised a hearty, “Here! Here!” About six hours later a servant girl frightened him into denying Jesus and being a no-show at the cross. Yet after the cross and the empty tomb, Jesus came to Peter and gave him the peace of forgiveness. Peter had witnessed the great deeds wrought by Christ for the world. Peter had also felt the truth of Jesus’ peace in his heart of hearts.

The testimony of the Bible doesn’t lay out a road map to God of right behavior. Here, speaking to Cornelius, Peter says nothing, absolutely nothing about right behavior, he speaks of only one thing, what he witnessed in Jesus. Before Cornelius he completes the definition of what it means to be a witness, because witnesses not only see, they also talk.

Like Peter, we have seen the goodness of God through Christ our Savior. Not only have we seen the cross and the open tomb, we have also known the peace of forgiveness through Christ’s name. Like Peter, our testimony must center on Jesus Christ, our Savior. We are his witnesses. And **Witnesses talk**. Amen.