

Easter 2 – Year B  
Faith Lutheran, Radcliff, KY  
Acts 26:19-29  
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Are you crazy? No, I just believe in the resurrection.

19 “So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. 20 First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. 21 That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. 22 But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— 23 that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.” 24 At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.” 25 “I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. 26 The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner. 27 King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.” 28 Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?” 29 Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”

The year is 60 A.D. The place: the palace of Herod Agrippa II in Caesarea on the coast of the Mediterranean. Caesarea is about 55 miles northwest of Jerusalem. The setting: The Apostle Paul has been in jail for two years. Now he stands in chains before the mighty Agrippa, great-grandson of Herod the Great, the wicked king who attempted to butcher the baby boys in Bethlehem. Paul’s case has been referred to Agrippa by a man named Festus. Festus is the new Roman governor of the province of Judea. With his Roman background Festus cannot comprehend why the Jewish leaders hate Paul so much and why Paul keeps talking about “a dead man named Jesus who Paul claimed was alive” (Acts 25:19). There in that one sentence is the whole problem. Paul believed it, the Jews didn’t believe it, and the Romans couldn’t understand it. The Jews said Jesus was dead, Paul said he was alive, and poor Festus doesn’t have a clue. So he passes the case along to Agrippa for his review.

Paul’s explanation to the king is very simple. In vs22-23 Paul affirms that as a Jew and as a Pharisee he shares in the hope of what God had promised to the Jewish people from the time of the prophets and even as far back as Moses. God promised that the Messiah, or Christ, would make himself known visibly to the Jews, suffer and die. The promises also stated that God would raise the Messiah from the dead, and that because of his resurrection God would raise his believing people from their graves. None of what Paul

taught went against the Jewish religion. But Festus blurts out, “Wait a minute... what did you say, Paul? A resurrection from the dead? You are out of your mind! Go sell crazy someplace else. We’re all stocked up here.”

There’s a television show entitled Dirty Jobs. The host travels all over the country and takes the cameras and his hands and feet into the nitty-gritty of some of the smelliest, dirtiest, and you’d-better-have-a-strong-stomach occupations. Some folks would say those people are crazy for having those jobs. Maybe someone has called you crazy because of what you do. Probably not. But maybe someone has called you crazy because you live in Kentucky and are not a UK fan, but the same could be said by U of L fans. Or talk to our neighbors to the northeast and they will call you crazy if you’ve lived in Ohio and are not a Buckeye fan.

Has anyone called you crazy for being a Christian? Maybe not to your face...but in a round-about way they have... because of what you believe. Then you stop and think. “Am I crazy for believing that God really created the world in just six, 24 hour days just by saying the word? Am I nuts for believing all those miracles Jesus performed? Am I out of my mind for believing that all of God’s Word is really his Word and not words of men, for believing that baptism really does save me from death and the devil, even for little infants, for believing that Jesus’ body and blood are truly present with this bread and wine? Am I a fool for standing at the coffin of a loved one, and believing that I will see this person again in the flesh?” Then you find yourself staring at your own grave and wondering the same thing.

I’m sure you’ve had heated arguments about these topics. We’ve had folks storm out of church because they did not understand why they couldn’t attend the Lord’s Supper. All these doctrines are clearly taught and supported by the Scriptures. But to our human reason they don’t always make sense. When the truth is faithfully preached and taught, it goes against human reason, like dragging nails across chalk board, the truth grates at our very being, “That can’t be! That’s insane!” Especially so with the first main teaching of the Bible – the Law. The Law condemns us. It points out where we have failed to keep God’s laws, and how we deserve his punishment.

Another pastor shared with me how people storm out of funerals they’ve conducted for Christian believers. The pastor was preaching the law section of the sermon, and saying, “This individual lying in this casket deserved to die.” To which our human reason screams out, “No! That’s not true!” The pastor continues, “This individual deserved to die because he/she was a sinner. What is more, they deserve eternal death, to suffer with devil and all his angels for all eternity.” No! They were a good person! They didn’t deserve to die! I don’t deserve to die, I’m a good person. We don’t deserve hell! This is crazy talk!

We would be called insane for saying such things. Paul was. But in Vs25 he states, “What I am saying is true and reasonable.” It is truth because it’s God’s Word. It is reasonable in this way: it is only possible to understand it when God makes it known through his Holy Word. And the truth comes out – the law condemns us. We must

admit, “We can’t do anything to save ourselves. The truth is, we all deserve to die. The truth is, we all deserve eternal suffering and punishment. For God has clearly stated, “All have sinned (Rom 3:23), there is no one who does good (Rom 3:10), death has come to all since all have sin (Rom 5:12).”

King Agrippa and the people of this sinful world do not want to believe these truths. By nature you and I don’t want to believe them either. It’s crazy talk. But the bottom line is this: if Christ had not come to earth, if he had not been innocent, had not suffered and died, had not been raised, then we have nothing to hope for. Then, who are the crazy ones? Those who do not believe these truths or those who do? The fact is, the truth is, those who don’t believe are the crazy ones. So what changed you from being like the rest of the world to someone like Paul, who was called “crazy”?

Christ did not come out of the clouds and shine a bright light into our faces and call out our name as he did with Apostle Paul on his way to Damascus to persecute more Christians. But Christ has called you. The apostle Peter says in 1Peter 2: 9, “God called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.” God called you. He proclaimed light to you – that light is the gospel: the good news that Jesus did come and live an innocent sin-free life, that he did suffer and die, and that he did rise from the dead – all for you. This good news, this light, was proclaimed to you by someone like an Apostle Paul. The Holy Spirit worked through the powerful Word to change your cold, stubborn heart.

Or maybe as an infant, your parents brought you to the baptismal font, where the light of the gospel was poured into your naturally dark soul. The power of the water and the Word caused you to believe the gospel; the good news of Christ’s death and resurrection. Over time, through instruction in the Word, you grew in your faith that this message is true and it is life and it is light – it shows us the path to heaven in this dark world. Because, my dear friends, the sinful world tells us there are many paths to heaven. But the gospel shines like a beacon and shows us that there is only one path to heaven, only through faith in Jesus. That sounds crazy to a lot of people in this world. We may be called insane for believing it. But we do. And the Holy Spirit has convinced us that this is truth and life for us.

What does that mean for you today? It means you have a firm conviction, an unwavering hope, a sure confidence of pardon of all your sins through Christ, of salvation from hell and Satan, of the ability to taunt death and your grave. Do you remember the hymn we sing whenever we have baptisms here at Faith Lutheran? God’s Own Child, I Gladly Say It... we boldly sing in stanza four, Death, you cannot end my gladness: I am baptized into Christ! When I die, I leave all sadness to inherit paradise! Though I lie in dust and ashes faith’s assurance brightly flashes: baptism has the strength divine to make life immortal mine. (Christian Worship Supplement 737:4) That’s what you have.

Not long ago I saw a picture in my e-mail inbox that showed a street sign named Cemetery Road. Underneath was another sign that read Dead End. That picture captures the way most people think about death. They believe that Cemetery Road leads to a Dead End from which there is no escape. So, is that true? Is the grave the end?

I recently read the story of the funeral of Sir Winston Churchill. Most of us know him as the man who single-handedly rallied the British people in the darkest days of World War II when the armies of Hitler were poised to cross the English Channel. By the power of his words he gave courage to an entire country. Before he died he planned his own funeral service at St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The service itself was magnificent in every way, filled with biblical liturgy and great hymns. Just as the benediction was pronounced, an unseen bugler hidden in one side of the dome began to play Taps, the traditional melody signaling the end of the day or the death of a soldier. As the mournful notes faded away, another bugler on the other side of the dome began to play Reveille, the traditional melody signaling the coming of a new day. "It's time to get up, it's time to get up, it's time to get up in the morning." It was Sir Winston's way of saying that though he was dead, he expected to "get up" in the day of the resurrection.

On Easter Sunday morning, God sounded reveille and Jesus rose up from the dead. Because of that day, Cemetery Road is no longer a Dead End. It is merely the beginning of your voyage to eternity with God.

Are you crazy for not fearing death? Are you crazy for believing that death means victory for you? Are you crazy for putting your hope of all eternity in a man who died 2000 years ago, and claims he rose again? Maybe in the eyes of the world. But you know that he was not just a man. He is the Almighty Son of God, your Savior, Jesus Christ, who did suffer and die for you, who rose again, and revealed this light-giving message to you so that might believe and know with sure certainty, heaven is mine. You're not crazy. You're saved through Christ Jesus. Amen.