

## Christ's Resurrection Turns Everything Upside Down

2<sup>nd</sup> Sun. of Easter – 04/11/21 – Mt. Calvary Luth.

Text: Acts 4:32-35 Pastor Keith Besel

v. 33 **“And with great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all.”**

### **Introduction**

✘ Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

✘ At first glance, this text seems like a bit of an odd selection for this Sunday; the Sunday immediately after the big day last week when we celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord.

→ Why are we looking at this early description of the Christian believers and what many might call their “wacky communal” way of life? “I mean, it’s not like you’re going to expect us to try and live that way, are you pastor?” “I’m not sure that I’m ready to go and sell my house and land and all of my belongings and then bring the proceeds here to the church and trust that others will do the same so that we will all be able to live happy and contented lives together until we die.”

✘ Well, no, I’m not going to tell you that you should live exactly like those early Christians. This text is after all not a command but merely a description of the difference Christ’s death and resurrection made for them in their day.

### **I. What Were They Facing?**

✘ Still, there is a great deal that we can learn from this example in the early Church of Christ. So, let’s begin by taking a quick look at the context; at what these people are facing when we come across them here in God’s Word.

→ At the beginning of chapter four, we find that the Temple captain; the Sadducees and the priests arrest Peter and John “because” they were proclaiming the resurrection from the dead in Jesus!

→ Verse four says that many believed their testimony – “about five thousand” people.

✘ Then we hear that the Jewish leaders gave these apostles a stern warning in verse 17, “to speak no more to anyone” in Jesus’ name. But they replied, “we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard” (v.20).

→ This addresses the compelling nature and power of the truth about Christ. Once you have heard it and the Holy Spirit has gifted you to believe it, you can’t keep it to yourself, can you? You’ve got to spread the news all over; to everyone!

✘ Back to the story: once Peter and John were released they went and shared what happened to them with their friends. And together they recalled how Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with both the Gentiles and Jews – so every part of their society and culture at that time – worked to arrest and beat and torture and crucify God’s Son, Jesus.

→ And the same threat was out there for His followers. So yes, this was a very dangerous time to be a believer in Christ.

→ That’s why they all prayed together, as verse 29 tells us, that the Lord would strengthen them to continue to speak His Word “with all boldness”. They wanted to be bold in their faith just like you and I desire to be today, right?

- ✘ And so they left everything to God to take care of them and to provide for their ministry to those in need. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

## II. The Power of the Resurrection

- ✘ Now we come to the beginning of our text today. We hear of this most amazing occurrence in verse 32. It says that “the full number” of believers “were of one heart and soul”. That’s a miraculous event to be sure. Everyone agreed with each other! It was a very large group of people, yet there was no conflict. And they sincerely believed the old adage, “what’s yours is mine and what’s mine is yours”.
  - ➔ It’s crazy isn’t it? The things of this world just were no longer of any importance to these people. Why? The next verse tells us why? “With great power the apostles were giving their testimony to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and great grace was upon them all”.
- ✘ They were hearing of something exponentially greater than anything they could acquire or possess here on earth. It was Peter and John’s witness to the fact of Christ’s victory over sin and death, and it had turned everything on its head!
  - ➔ Again, why? Well, think of what we’re talking about.
  - ➔ Sin is the one thing that we all struggle with from birth. We confess it every Sunday as we begin worship, that you and I are each “a poor, miserable sinner” who has offended God by our sin so much that we “justly deserve” His “temporal and eternal punishment” – that means punishment here and now in time and punishment forever in hell – that’s death; that’s eternity apart from God.
  - ➔ Yes, that guilt – yours and mine – is why Jesus endured the persecution, suffering and ultimately the wrath of God, His Father on the cross!
- ✘ And all of this played right into the hands of the jealous, blood-thirsty and corrupt leaders in the Jewish church. Yet, even as they crucified Jesus, His own words show that He was dying for them too. Remember, He said, “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (Lk. 23:34).
  - ➔ And so Jesus died. Yes, death had its way with Him who became the essence and reality of all sin in the world that day on Golgatha.
- ✘ But wait – the apostles are giving a testimony in today’s text, not to Christ’s death but to His victory over death; to His resurrection from death! Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
  - ➔ This is why everything has changed for these believers in our text. People don’t just rise from the dead. Benjamin Franklin famously said, “Only two things are certain – death and taxes”.
  - ➔ The normal pattern that everyone has witnessed here on earth in the past and today as well is that 1) 1<sup>st</sup> you’re born, 2) then you live, and 3) then you die; that’s it!
- ✘ But these two apostles were giving a powerful testimony to a change; to a new reality! They actually saw the One who died on a cross and was buried in a tomb now alive!
  - ➔ Our Gospel Reading says in John 20:20 that Jesus “showed them His hands and His side”. They even saw Thomas put his finger in the wounds from the nails and his hand in the place where the spear pierced up into Jesus’ chest cavity.
  - ➔ John is the one who recorded it not only in his Gospel account but also in our Epistle reading from John’s first letter where he emphasizes, “That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with

our hands, concerning the word of life...we have seen it, and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life...that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ" (1 Jn. 1:1-3).

✘ That is the power of the truth of Christ's resurrection. It makes miracles happen, like thousands of believers being gathered together without conflict, in a time of great danger, yet fully content and filled with joy. Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

→ This reality is huge. It's life-changing. The normal pattern and understanding of what is important is all flipped around. Before Christ's death and victory the only pattern man knew was that 1) first you're born, 2) then you live and 3) then you die. And following that pattern in regard to our belongings, 1) first you have nothing, 2) then you gain possessions as you grow and 3) at death you lose it all.

### III. Everything Turned Upside Down

✘ But now with Christ's resurrection, we have a different pattern in place. Paul talks about that pattern in Ephesians 2:1-7. He begins by showing us the old pattern when he says, "You were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air" (that is Satan).

→ It's in that sin-filled state that Paul says we "once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind" (vv.2-3).

→ Yes, when we live according to the world we become obsessed with gain; with keeping and protecting the things of this world. "These are my things; my favorite toys, clothes, pets, unscriptural shows, items of furniture, activities to fill my time; my people to hang with."

→ "And yes, I know I shouldn't let these be so important to me, but come on Pastor, this is what gives me even a little bit of joy in life". "And besides, what if I lose my job or get sick or something else happens. I need to save some of this just in case, right?"

→ Well, Paul is telling us here, "think what you want folks – according to that pattern of thinking, you're still dead. And you're really dirt poor!"

✘ But then in verse four Paul says that God has done something amazing; something different in His Son, Jesus. "...being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which He loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, [God] made us alive together with Christ ... and raised us up with Him and seated us with Him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus, so that in the coming ages He might show the immeasurable riches of His grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus." (Eph. 2:4-7).

→ You see, this is all God's gift to you and me folks – given to us in His powerful and saving work of baptism! And it is Christ's resurrection that makes all the difference because it's in baptism that we are crucified with Jesus to sin and raised with Jesus to new, eternal life! (Rom. 6). Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

### IV. Living the Christian Resurrection Life

✘ We see this difference played out among the believers in verses 34-35 of our text today. "There was not a needy person among them, for as many as were owners of lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold and laid it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to each as any had need."

- That is so foreign to our way of living that it's virtually impossible for us to think that kind of thing could ever actually be real; could ever actually work.
- But that's because for them, earthly things didn't matter anymore. And let's admit it, earthly things do still matter to us...far too much of the time.
- ⊗ But for the people here in Acts, even in a time of great earthly danger, earthly life was all about one thing and one thing only – spreading the news about Jesus; proclaiming with “great power” that Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
  - You and I have identified the same Biblical truths as our priorities; as the mission of Christ's Church here at Mt. Calvary. We remind ourselves of it each Sunday – what is the mission of our church here? *Sharing God's Word. Serving All* in the name of our resurrected and victorious Lord Jesus.
  - This is the new pattern of Christian life. This is where we find true and lasting joy and contentment. Yes, now we know that 1) first we are born dead in sin, then 2) we are given life in Baptism and through Christ's power and grace; and after we leave this earth 3) then we arrive in eternal glory before the heavenly throne of God.

## Conclusion

- ⊗ You see, belief in the resurrection does not require that we hide from this life, but instead it propels us into it. Because we have no doubt that the resurrection is true, the uncertainty and worries of tomorrow can no longer control us.
  - No, the resurrection frees us to love others lavishly; to share with others recklessly; and to live in the joy of Christ fully ... today!
- ⊗ As for the future, the resurrection of Christ is what makes it possible for us to actually mean what we confessed earlier at the end of the Nicene Creed, “I believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church, I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins, and I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come”.
  - Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*