

## **This Shadow Changes Everything**

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

Text: Acts 5:12-32 Pastor Keith Besel

vv. 14-15, **“And more than ever believers were added to the Lord...so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them”.**

### **Introduction**

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

✘ I assume most of us here know what it's like to attend some outdoor event on a hot summer day; maybe it's a Rockies baseball game or an outdoor concert or a high school or college graduation – some place where you are in a stadium on a set of bleachers or in the stands.

→ Initially you're excited for the special event, but as the sun moves across the sky you find that it's shining directly at you at its hottest point. There's no source of shade available, so you sit there in the sweltering, oven-like heat that gets ever closer to the point of unbearable. And then some white puffy clouds drift by so that the shadow they create truly becomes a godsend from heaven. That shadow from the clouds changes your entire attitude. Now you can go back to enjoying the game or concert or whatever the event might be. As long as the clouds cast their shadows you're happy and comfortable and content.

→ How many of you have ever had this kind of experience before?

### **I. Shadow Imagery points to God's presence/power**

✘ I want you to picture a much different scenario. Jesus has risen from His grave and ascended into heaven. The Christian Church is just getting started and the believers are jubilant and excited. There are no church buildings yet, so they gather together in homes to have fellowship and prayer; to listen to Christ's apostles teach them and to eat meals together.

→ Things have changed dramatically for these new believers, because Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!* Yes, their entire mindset is different from what it was before His resurrection. They've sold land and belongings to form a new community; a new body of believers called the Church. More and more people, “multitudes of both men and women” according to verse 14, have been added to their numbers.

→ It's like a night and day difference now compared to the grief-filled days immediately after Jesus had been crucified!

✘ Peter, the one who denied Jesus three times, has now been restored by Jesus as an entirely new man. He stands tall as the earthly leader of this growing church, along with the apostle John. The two of them have just healed a beggar who could not walk.

→ But the religious leaders don't like what's going on. They are “filled with jealousy” (v. 17) because the people are turning from them to this new teaching about the risen Christ. So they're trying to stop the apostles from talking about Jesus. They want to completely silence the message from spreading around that Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*

→ But it didn't work. The Holy Spirit has filled Peter with a new boldness to proclaim before our text in chapter 4:12, "There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved".

✘ Now we're told that the apostles are performing incredible signs and wonders among the people so that people would carry the sick and those with unclean spirits out into the streets. Their desperate hope was that Peter might stop and heal them; might cast the evil spirits out. They believed in the power of Christ within Peter to the point that they were convinced that even if Peter's shadow might pass over the sick they would be made whole once again. It must have been true to some extent because verse 16 concludes with the simple statement: "they were all healed".

→ How can this possibly be true? Shadows don't heal people. But remember the time in Luke, chapter eight, when Jesus was traveling in a crowd of people to heal the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, a synagogue ruler? She was dying. And along the way, a woman who had a discharge of blood for twelve years that no doctor could help, crept up to Jesus. All she had to do was touch the hem of Jesus' garment and whoa! She was healed on the spot. Jesus, as God, is all-powerful. If He can heal someone at just the touch of His garment, He certainly can attach the same power of God to Peter's shadow if He desires it.

✘ In Luke, chapter one, we see that God can be powerfully present in a shadow. When the time came for Jesus to be born, the angel came to Mary to let her know that she would give birth to the very Son of God. She was confused because she was a virgin. So she asked, "How can this be?" The angel answered in Luke 1:35, "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God". You see, God cast His shadow over Mary, and she gave birth to Jesus, the Savior of the world.

→ Later in Jesus' life, He went up a mountain with Peter, James, and John where He was transfigured before their eyes. He was blazing white – dazzling glory shone around Him and Moses and Elijah, who had died centuries before appeared and talked with Jesus. Incredibly, we're told in Luke 9:34-35 that "a cloud came and overshadowed them...and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, 'This is My Son, My Chosen One; listen to Him!'"

✘ You see, from Scripture itself we hear that when God's shadow appears, His very presence and power are in it, with it and through it. So yes, Peter's shadow could have healed the people that day, not because of any power he had but because God was there performing those amazing signs and wonders.

→ Long before Peter walked by that crowd of people the writer of Psalm 91 knew the wonderful gift of God's shadow. He said in verses 1-2, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say to the Lord, 'My refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust'".

## II. Shadow Imagery Can be Negative

✘ At the same time however the word and imagery of a shadow can also have a very negative understanding in the Bible. We see it often as we come to church and find the casket of our

loved ones only a few feet away from us. It's only been a few days ago that they took their last breath and now the time has come to say "good-bye". One of the most common passages read at funeral services is Psalm 23, for a good reason. Verse four of that Psalm cuts to the depths of our soul when it says, "Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death...".

→ There the shadow is not talking about God's power but death's power over us. This time, the cloud is not the presence of healing and life but the ugly presence of death that hangs over you like a cloud of disease and grief. No, the shadow here is not one of joyous excitement but one of tear-filled sorrow.

⊗ And in another psalm, Psalm 144:4, we're told, "Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow". Isaiah 40:7 speaks of this quick and fleeting nature of our lives on this planet another way; saying, "The grass withers, the flower fades". Our loved one's last few years went by so fast, and we realize how much of our own life has already gone by. Like a passing shadow, we can't help but feel life slipping away.

→ Right now the shadow of life seems quite dark and ominous to many of us. We don't want to be under this shadow any more than we must. Instead you and I long for the shadow of God's healing presence in our lives.

### III. The shadow of death changed to the shadow of life.

⊗ So, how do we get there? How does that shadow change from the shadow of death into the shadow of God's presence and life? Perhaps an old comic by Johnny Hart can answer that question. Johnny Hart's comic strip, *BC* has long been one of my favorites, especially since I noticed around 30 years ago that he often incorporated his Christian faith into his work.

→ Hart died in 2007 but the cartoon continues to have Christian undertones especially around the holidays of Christmas and Easter because Hart's two grandsons, Mason and Mick Mastroianni have taken it over.

⊗ Back in 1999, the Easter Sunday cartoon spoke of what Jesus' resurrection meant to Hart and others. It starts with a cavewoman watching a caveman tie a rope around two sticks in the form of a cross planted on a hill. She asks if he's building his new Easter model. He says it's part of it, and that the sticks represent God.

→ Then the two of them walk a long way away from the cross, creating two sets of footprints. He says the two of them will represent Adam and Eve. The Bible verses at the end of the footprints are Mark 10:26-27 and Mark 11:22.

→ They turn around and the woman sees just how far away they are from God which prompts her to ask if God hates them. The man assures her that no, God is a God of love. She says, "But we rejected Him". "Even so," the man says, "He will always reach out to save us."

→ At that point Eve makes a cute comment, asking if God is into collectibles to which Adam excitedly replies that He is. And then he invites her to watch the sun shine on the cross. The sun slowly sets closer and closer to behind the cross, showing the shadow of the cross getting longer and longer; closer and closer to Adam and Eve. When he says, "Watch what happens when the sun gets to the cross", she asks if it is the S-O-N, His Son? He says, "That's GOOD!"

- Then, just before the sun sets directly behind the cross, the shadow of the cross beams reach and cover both the man and the woman. And Adam says he stands “corrected”, meaning it’s not “good” that we end up on the cross with Jesus! (<https://johnhartstudios.com>)
- ⊗ However, when you and I stand in the shadow of the empty cross, with Jesus risen from the dead, God’s powerful presence chases away the gloomy shadow of death so that Jesus’ resurrection overshadows us with the very promise of life with Him for all eternity. Your loved one, lying in the casket who believed in Jesus will physically...bodily live, and so will you, because Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
- You see, Jesus’ resurrection changes everything! Think of Thomas, the disciple who was missing from the upper room that first Easter morning. He would not believe that Jesus was alive. Not even Peter could convince him of what had happened; what they all had seen. Thomas needed to see Jesus for himself.
- A week later, Jesus appears again in His resurrected body and tells Thomas, “Put your finger here, and see My hands; and put out your hand, and place it in My side. Do not disbelieve, but believe” (Jn. 20:27). It’s at that moment that the shadow of death turned into the shadow of life and Thomas was whole again. The difference? Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia!*
- ⊗ The same is true for you and me today. Granted, we can’t reach out and physically touch the nail marks in Jesus’ hands and side like Thomas did. We don’t have Peter’s shadow passing over us with God’s healing presence and power, like the crowds had in our text. But we do reach out with our hands and physically receive the risen body of Christ in the bread at His Supper. We do bring the cup filled with His powerful presence in His blood to our lips and we physically taste of His transforming grace and forgiveness so that we now bask in His light and life for all eternity.
- Yes, the shadow of gloom and death is changed to the shadow of God’s power and life in Christ’s resurrected presence in and among us all as His believers.
- ⊗ Can you see this shadow? Not with the eyes of your flesh, but with the eyes of His gift of the Holy Spirit and faith? Believe it, because you believe in God’s amazing and almighty power at work in, among and for you in His resurrected Son. Listen again to Jesus’ words to Thomas in John 20:29, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed”. Jesus is talking about you! Jesus blesses you as only He can do.
- Christ is risen. *He is risen indeed. Alleluia! Amen.*