

16 April 2023  
Easter 2

St. Athanasius Lutheran Church  
Vienna, VA

Jesu Juva

“The Confidence to Go On”

Text: Acts 5:29-42; John 20:19-31; 1 Peter 1:3-9

**Alleluia! Christ is Risen!** [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

Grace, mercy, and peace to you from God our Father, and from our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. Amen.

See? This is *exactly* what they were afraid of. This is *exactly* what they were afraid was going to happen. And it is. This is *exactly* why they shut themselves in that room and locked the doors and windows. The Jewish leaders were after them. They had crucified Jesus, and now they were after them. The book of Acts tells us how disciples were being arrested, threatened, imprisoned, and beaten. And more than that, the Jewish leaders wanted to kill them, just as they had Jesus. It was all happening. Like the fears you have that show up in your dreams. Like that you have a presentation at work or school and the day comes and you don't have it! Except *you* wake up and go on. For them, it was real.

*And yet they went on.* They were arrested and threatened, *yet they went on.* They were thrown in prison, *yet they went on.* They were beaten, *yet they went on.* Not because *they* were the ones who woke up from a bad dream, but because Jesus did! Jesus is the one who “woke up” from the dead after being threatened, arrested, imprisoned, beaten, and finally crucified. All that the Jewish leaders threw at Him and all that Rome could do to Him had been done. They were out of ammo. They had nothing left. And they lost. Jesus was alive, risen from the dead. So the disciples could go on.

So they could unlock the doors and windows of that room they were hiding in and go back out. Jesus had come to them and given them the peace they needed, the forgiveness they needed, and the joy and assurance they needed. That was real, too. It was no dream. They heard Jesus, they touched Jesus, they ate with Jesus. And it was the *same* Jesus. The nail holes were still there, the hole in His side was still there - just ask Thomas! But one thing was no longer there - death. Death had met its match, and lost.

So the disciples who were there that night went out and told Thomas, and after receiving the Holy Spirit Jesus had promised to send them, they went to the Temple to tell everyone. Which was like going into the lion's den, isn't it? Why go there?

Well, they went to the place where the curtain had been torn in two from top to bottom at Jesus' death (and perhaps hastily repaired and replaced by the Jews) to proclaim what

that meant - that it was torn in two because it *was no longer needed!* God and man were no longer separated, but had been reconciled, brought together again, by Jesus.

They went to the place also where sacrifices were offered - to proclaim that they, too, *were no longer needed!* For the Lamb of God had been sacrificed and His blood cleanses us from all sin. His blood now poured upon us in Baptism and poured into us in His Supper. The forgiveness and life we need is the forgiveness and life we have, in Jesus. They proclaimed these things in the very Temple where they were and were happening . . . and people were listening. And people were believing. *And so the Jewish leaders were fuming.*

Perhaps here is a good place to stop in the story and think a bit about our situation today. Are there things that we, too, are saying that cause other to fume and rage? Some who may be powerful and some who may just be loud. Who say: You must say this. You must do that. You must go along with what we say is right and true and just, or else! And if you dare to disagree, you must do so quietly and not in our modern-day “temples” - the public squares, the social media sites - of our world today.

And you know the issues, what is causing this today. You must not say that marriage is between one man and one woman. You must not say that men are men and women are women, and that gender is of the body and not of the mind. You must not say that all lives matter, no matter what color, no matter if they are in the womb or out of the womb, no matter how old or weak or confused or disabled they are. You must not say that what someone thinks is right is wrong. You must not say that Jesus is the only way to the Father. In fact, do you remember the story of when a lawyer asked Jesus what the great commandment in the Law was (Matthew 22:35-40)? Today, I think, the expected answer would be: *Thou shalt not judge!* Thou shalt not judge what anyone believes. Thou shalt not judge what anyone does. Or else.

So some people lock themselves in - in their rooms, in their houses, in their own little worlds - like the disciples did that night. Afraid. Afraid of what will happen to them. And if we're honest, we all *at least* have moments like that; maybe more than a few. When we should speak but remain silent. When we should act but don't. When our fears get the best of us. Which is why we confess our sin here every week. And this is one of the things I know I confess every week - maybe you, too? That I have lived in fear, that I have lived as if Jesus is still in the tomb and lost, that I have lived more worried about what the world thinks than what God thinks, that I have lived as if the world and those in the world have power over my life, whether I live or die.

**But they don't.** *They don't!* For just as a risen and living Jesus came to those frightened disciples who locked themselves in that room, so He comes to us here with the peace we need, the forgiveness we need, and the joy and assurance we need. The same **Jesus** with the same **victory**, the same **life**, and the same **gifts**. The same Jesus they thought they had

power over. Turns out, they didn't. *He* is the one with the power of life and death. He is the one who woke up from death and came out of tomb, alive. And now He says to you: I forgive you all your sins. And He baptizes you into His resurrection and raises you to a new life with Him. And He feeds you with food that will not and can not perish - His own Body and Blood. And so like the disciples, we can now go out from this place. We came locked in our fears and sins, and we leave with His forgiveness and life. Free.

So the Jewish leaders were fuming and wanted to kill the apostles, *still* thinking they were the ones who had the power of life and death. But one of them, named Gamaliel, had some wise words. *Don't fight against God!* If this is from men, it will fail. History shows us that. But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop it.

Which is good for us to hear as well. Those things we see in our world today, the sin which seems so pervasive, the rebellion against God and His Word and truth, this movement that seems to be winning, **it is of men and so will fail**. And what is of God, His Word, His life, His forgiveness, **will go on**. It will not, it *can* not be stopped. Jesus had said the same thing earlier when He told the disciples: *the gates of hell would not be able to stand against the confession of His Church* (Matthew 16:18).

Not that it will be easy. The Jewish leaders beat the apostles before letting them go. I'm not sure exactly what that means - were they whipped? Beaten with a rod? Did they receive 39 lashes? Whatever it was, I'm sure it wasn't enjoyable. **But it also did not stop them**. It could not. In fact, they *rejoiced that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name of Jesus*. Which is quite a turn around! From being afraid of this very thing to rejoicing in it! And not only did it not stop them, it compelled them *even more* to continue. To go out and go on.

So maybe you will be beaten; tongue-lashed maybe, at the least. If you are, *rejoice and be glad*, Jesus said, *for your reward is great in heaven* (Matthew 5:12). You are among the ***blessed who have not seen and yet have believed***. And while we often seek the blessing and approval of the world and our peers, that, as Gamaliel reminds us, is of men and so will pass away. And sometimes very quickly! How much better is the blessing and approval of our heavenly Father, which will not pass away. Which, as Jesus showed us, not even death can end. For it is not the world or anyone in the world who has the power of life and death, Jesus does. And that life He has given to you. You have that ***inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you***, as we heard from Peter today. For (as Peter also said) you have been ***born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead*** through your Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection. And He is keeping your life and inheritance and guarding you, through trials and challenges, through joys and sorrows, through all the ups and downs you go through. For in a world that is ever changing, there is one thing that does not: Jesus. The one still coming to us today with His peace.

*So what's going on with you? Maybe it's something you're battling, maybe something that's happening to a loved one, maybe a fear of tomorrow and what lay in the future. Satan tries to magnify all these things and make them look really big and powerful and block out Jesus. Make you think you're on your own. Make you try to take him on by yourself. Don't try it! You'll lose. *Big.**

But Christ crucified is our North Star. Christ crucified is our guiding light. That is, not just Christ *crucified* - but as we are celebrating this season - *now risen from the dead*. So that is and must be what shines forth here, in this place, in the Church. That in the midst of a world and life seeking to block out Jesus, to block out our hope and joy and forgiveness, we constantly come back to where Jesus is, where the same Jesus with the nail holes and hole in His side are for us today, to be re-oriented, to be forgiven, to be raised to life again, to be filled with confidence and joy. To know that He lives, and if He lives, so do I, and so will I. For He who unlocked the bars of death and the grave, can also unlock the fears in our hearts.

So like the disciples, we can go out, and we can go on. Until one day we go out from this world and go on to that life where there is only life, where death is no more, sin is no more, and evil is no more. For that is of God and so - as Gamaliel rightly said - the life and kingdom that will not, can not fail.

For **Christ is risen!** [*He is risen indeed! Alleluia!*] Alleluia!

In the Name of the Father, and of the (+) Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Now the peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through faith in Christ Jesus, our Lord. Amen.