

Text: Acts 5:12, 17–32

¹² The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. ... ¹⁷ Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. ¹⁸ They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. ¹⁹ But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. ²⁰ "Go, stand in the temple courts," he said, "and tell the people the full message of this new life." ²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people. When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ "We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside." ²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were puzzled, wondering what would come of this. ²⁵ Then someone came and said, "Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people." ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them. ²⁷ Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood." ²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men! ³⁰ The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

Prayer of the Day:

O risen Lord, you came to your disciples and took away their fears with your word of peace. Come to us also by Word and Sacrament, and banish our fears with the comforting assurance of your abiding presence; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.

Verse of the Day:

Alleluia. Alleluia. Christ is risen! He is risen indeed! Alleluia. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed. Alleluia. (John 20:29b)

Sermon Text:

Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven spirits before his throne, ⁵ and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, the firstborn from the dead, and the ruler of the kings of the earth. To him who loves us and has freed us from our sins by his blood, ⁶ and has made us to be a kingdom and priests to serve his God and Father—to him be glory and power forever and ever! Amen.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, imagine for just a moment the roller coaster the disciples are on. They had watched Jesus die and not some nice calm it gave us peace to watch kinda death. He died horrifically. He was murdered, tortured to death on a cross after being beaten to an absolute pulp. Then came Easter and the risen Christ left them befuddled, hope-filled but confused none-the-less. Then in our Gospel Lesson today, came the appearances. Joy and elation as they began to realize everything that Easter really meant for them: sins forgiven, strength to unlock the doors and head out into the world with this newfound joy and hope. And then ... well, then ... how was the message they had to preach received? Oh, there would be more than a few who heard and believed, but there would also be plenty of those who did not. Even in their successes, there was petty jealousy from the rulers and authorities. The Sadducees in our lesson today are a prime example of that. It probably felt a little like one step forward and two steps back, little bright spots in a sea of darkness.

Does life ever feel like that to you? I don't know, maybe I've totally missed the mark but it sure can feel like that sometimes. In the world around us. There are real joys right? I mean we just had Easter. Turn outs were good. The chairs had to be set up to accommodate the worshippers who gathered. Kids were hunting eggs and joyous at the prospect of candy, our breakfast crew out did themselves once again. Life was good. But then ... well we cheated this year and confirmation fell on the Sunday after Easter but the flowers, if you look closely enough they are already starting to fade a bit and even with confirmation, I kinda doubt we will hit the same numbers that we did last Sunday.

Life is no different. Joy and elation over the job promotion, the birth of a child, just a perfect day out and about in weather that finally seems to be turning on the lights and the warmth and then, the promotion brings new problems, the kid won't let you sleep at night, the news says prices are higher and outlooks look dire, the whole is on fire and well the roller coaster gets going.

Let's bring it into the realm of the church too, this morning. It's no secret that attendance has slid here at church the last five years, I don't wanna say the name of what kicked it off anymore, but it's been a struggle to get things back on track. Even though some are seeing gains in certain areas, Christianity as a whole is on the decline ... at least in the United States. Our school has had its struggles. Still does. Oh, we are seeing new families, new members, baptisms, confirmations but it's all part of a seemingly endless rollercoaster. Ups and downs. Bright spots in a sea of darkness. ... Or at least that's what Satan wants us to believe.

Pause for a moment and look back at our lesson today. The disciples were successful and then in prison released and then in front of the Sanhedrin who wanted them to pack it in and stop all of it. Consider how many times that temptation would be set in front of them over the years. Things weren't going so very well. Didn't go so very well for any of them. Where did they find hope in all of this?

Listen again to the words of God. ²⁷ *Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest.* ²⁸ *"We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," he said. "Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."* ²⁹ *Peter and the other apostles replied: "We must obey God rather than men!"* ³⁰ *The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead — whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.* ³¹ *God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.* ³² *We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."*

The world around them wouldn't make them stop and why? They simply didn't place there hope there. *"We must obey God rather than men!"* That was the simple and triumphant reply. This God was more valuable and greater importance than anything the Sanhedrin could take from them. Even their very lives. Be silenced in the endeavor? Far from it! They proclaim what God has done all over again. Even in the face of opposition from men more powerful than themselves. ³⁰ *The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead — whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree.* ³¹ *God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel.*

Yes, this is where we find our strength too. Make no mistake about it, satan will try hard to pull us loose from these moorings, but ultimately it's because has long been adrift from the One who controls all things and really doesn't want to be reminded of that truth. Christ is Prince, King of all creation. His rule and will will be done whether it has our blessing or not. And of course, more important than even that, He is *Savior*. That Word carries a purpose, *that He might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel*. He is the One who has saved us, forgiven us when we would bow to the temptations set before us and forget the purposes for which we were sent. His blood and His empty tomb anchor us in the bedrock of His Word and grant strength and purpose beyond what our eyes may see and our ears may hear.

We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him. This, this is what they did. It's how the disciples seemingly endured the rollercoaster unfazed by the warring world around them. It's how they battled back when satan and his temptations bludgeoned them at every turn. It's what cancelled out their shortcomings and inadequacy, their sin, when confronted with a monumental task of proclaiming Christ in a world far more hostile than anything we have come face to face with.

Dear Christian, it's your strength and purpose too. In fact, it's the only reason we are still here. You are witnesses of the triumph of Jesus. He has left you here to proclaim for the number of years He provides you with strength. He wants you to be more than a bright spot in a sea of darkness but wants you to shine with the light of the sun, His Son, in a world that desperately needs it. He does all the heavy lifting. He has saved. He has planned and accomplished. He simply bids you to be His voice, His hands and feet, in a dying world full of sinners just like you.

We have 10 confirmands before us this weekend. What a blessing! For some of them life has already been full of ups and downs. I don't want to scare you but there will be more. Some people really love a rollercoaster, some don't. I can't promise you sunshine and lollipops throughout life. In fact, in the course of our studies, I've already said the opposite is more likely the truth. But then, I can promise you this, "Christ is risen! He is risen indeed!! Alleluia!!! And that, well it means something. No, it means everything. You are His own. Your life has a purpose. The God who saved us has called us to shoulder that together and where two or three are gathered in His Name, well ... He's there too. He's done it all, you and I, **WE ARE WITNESSES OF THESE THINGS.** Amen!