

## **Act of Witness**

Acts of Hope: Part 1 “Act of Witness”

Rev. Cameron D St. Michael – April 24, 2022

2<sup>nd</sup> Sunday of Easter

**Readings:** Acts 5:17-32

**Reflection:** Psalm 150

**Greeting:** Surely God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid. The Lord, the Lord is my strength and my song. He has become my salvation. Praise the Lord! (*Isaiah 12:2*)

**Prayer:** Almighty God, through your only Son you overcame death and opened to us the gate of everlasting life. Grant that we who celebrate our Lord’s resurrection, by the renewing of your Spirit, arise from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

**Reflection:** Psalm 150

*Praise the LORD! Praise God in his sanctuary; praise him in his mighty firmament! Praise him for his mighty deeds; praise him according to his surpassing greatness! Praise him with trumpet sound; praise him with lute and harp! Praise him with tambourine and dance; praise him with strings and pipe! Praise him with clanging cymbals; praise him with loud clashing cymbals! Let everything that breathes praise the LORD! Praise the LORD!*  
(Psalm 150 NRSV\*)

We read the words of Psalm 150 and hear of celebration. We hear of the many ways we should praise God. In what ways do you praise God in your everyday life? What joy does it bring to you to praise the Lord? How do you share in that praise with others? How can we share the message of hope we find in our God’s steadfast love? How do you share in the joy of our Risen Savior?

**Prayer:** O God, our light, our beauty, our rest: In the resurrection of your Son you have brought us into your new creation. Form us into your people, and order our lives in you. Help us with our doubts and fears and strengthen us in love as we come before you in prayer. May you guide us in all things; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen. Alleluia.

Now let the words of our mouths, and the meditations of our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O Lord, our Rock and our Redeemer. Amen.

## Sermon:

Our scripture reading for today comes from the Common English Bible. Our first reading for today comes from Acts chapter 5 verses 17 through 32.

*The high priest, together with his allies, the Sadducees, was overcome with jealousy. They seized the apostles and made a public show of putting them in prison. An angel from the Lord opened the prison doors during the night and led them out. The angel told them, "Go, take your place in the temple, and tell the people everything about this new life." Early in the morning, they went into the temple as they had been told and began to teach. When the high priest and his colleagues gathered, they convened the Jerusalem Council, that is, the full assembly of Israel's elders. They sent word to the prison to have the apostles brought before them. However, the guards didn't find them in the prison. They returned and reported, "We found the prison locked and well-secured, with guards standing at the doors, but when we opened the doors we found no one inside!" When they received this news, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were baffled and wondered what might be happening. Just then, someone arrived and announced, "Look! The people you put in prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people!" Then the captain left with his guards and brought the apostles back. They didn't use force because they were afraid the people would stone them. The apostles were brought before the council where the high priest confronted them: "In no uncertain terms, we demanded that you not teach in this name. And look at you! You have filled Jerusalem with your teaching. And you are determined to hold us responsible for this man's death." Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than humans! The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God has exalted Jesus to his right side as leader and savior so that he could enable Israel to change its heart and life and to find forgiveness for sins. We are witnesses of such things, as is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him." (Acts 5:17-32 CEB+)*

This is the word of God for the people of God. Thanks be to God.

Today we begin a new series called "Acts of Hope." Throughout the Easter season through Pentecost, we will be going through different lessons that we learn from the Acts of the Apostles. Our first lesson is about an act of witness. In our reading today the apostles have been thrown in jail. So, what happens? An angel opens the doors and lets them out. What do they do? They go back to teaching the people about this new life they have in Christ. It's important enough for them to be going out and doing this. And so, when the high priest and all the others get together, they send for the apostles to be brought before them. Lo and behold, they can't be found. That is, until somebody says, "Oh, those guys are over teaching in the temple." So, they gather them up and they bring them in and they say "we told you not to teach all of this. And look, you're teaching everyone. You're doing the opposite of what we told you." The response from Peter and the apostles is "well that's what God wants us to do. Jesus was raised from the dead and now we're telling everybody about this new life they can have. Because it happened so that people could find forgiveness for sins, that they could change their hearts and lives. And we're witnesses to this, so we have to speak it." They're witnesses, so they go, and they share it. And you know, this is a pretty big thing. Because they're thrown

in jail for their teachings. An angel busts them out so they can go back to teaching. So they're right back there again. And when asked why it's because they want people to have this new life. That seems like a pretty good reason for me. They want others to know they can be forgiven. They want others to know that they are loved. They want others to know they can live this new life. That they can change their hearts and their lives through Christ. What's not to love? And they do it because of the way that their lives have been changed, because they have seen the way that it changes lives. They have seen the impact, so they share it.

And because they share it, not everyone's happy. The people that they're upsetting are upset because it upsets the power structure. Because it's the people who are most at risk of losing their power that are the ones upset at these teachings. Because it risked bringing about real change. But it was dangerous because of how they shared. We are called to share our witness in a way that conveys the change we've experienced. We have to convey our witness in authentic way. Had the apostles been saying something that didn't connect with anybody, the authorities wouldn't have been worried at all. Why wouldn't they have been worried? Because nobody would have cared. But what they said connected with people. What they said resounded with people. It threatened to mess up somebody else's control.

The other things this speaks of is that they went to jail. They were in prison for sharing their witness. They got out and went back to sharing and then were hauled before the authorities again to explain why they were still defying them. And the reason? Because they have to share the good news. What else could they do with it? And that raised a great point for me. How can we not share when that's the best news that we have? When that's the greatest thing we have, how do we not share it? God has made it possible to change hearts and lives, to find forgiveness for sins. How do we not share that? Something to note here is that they were effective not because of what they had to convey. Not because they just went out and said this is what happened. This is what happened. How often do we go out and just say this is what happened? When people want to know what our witness is that we say Jesus was crucified and raised in the third day, so believe it. Believe in what? That it happened? What happens if you believe that it happened and have nothing else to go on? You don't get the message about changing your heart and changing your life because the entire message was just what happened and not a witness to the change that it brings. And that's where so often there's a disconnect, because we don't bring a witness of our experience. We give a retelling of an event, not the re-experiencing of our own hearts and lives being changed. Not the retelling of our personal story, the story of the way that Christ has changed us, but too often a pamphlet or a tract to give out information and not salvation. To give out knowledge but not nurturing. To get out facts but not feelings. And that's how we relate to this because Christ's death and resurrection isn't just an event, but it's a feeling deep inside that should resonate with you. And if it resonates with you, it will resonate with the people that you share it with because you share your witness. The way that this has altered your life. The way that this has changed you. And that's what we share. Because that's the thing that people want to know. That's the thing that

draws people to Christ is understanding that love, that grace, and that mercy by the way that we translate that love and grace and mercy when we share our story with others. But we have to be willing to go out and do it.

The apostles were willing to go out and do it even if it meant being hauled off to jail again. Even if it meant an angel was going to have to come and bust them out of jail just so they can get right back out to telling people the good news. They didn't mind making some people uncomfortable who were going to lose power because of what they were being told. They didn't mind rocking the boat with the people in charge because they had good news for everyone. Because they went out and they shared their experience, and they gave people hope. Because if there's something that hasn't changed in all these years it is that people are always eager for hope. People will always want to know more about love. People will always need to be forgiven. The details may change. The times may change. But those things are always there. And we relate to people not by telling them an ancient story, but by telling them the way that that story is alive today. Even the apostles being jailed were telling the story of how Christ was alive in their lives that moment, how Christ was changing their lives that day, how Christ was present with them, and the Holy Spirit being a witness to that love.

And that's why the message connected: because of the lives that were changed. Because of the way that they bore witness to the love and grace and mercy of our Savior. Because they didn't just tell people about it, they lived it to others. Their witness was about their personal experience in Christ with an invitation for others to join them. And that's the example set for us now. That we are called to give our witness today about the way that Christ has changed your lives. The way that that love has impacted you. And you are called to share that with the people around you. Maybe it's the people here, that we strengthen each other in faith. Maybe it's the people that are out there who've heard the story 1000 times but haven't heard the way that it actually changes hearts and lives. Maybe it's somebody who's just waiting for someone to show them that kind of love. We are called to give witness because a great love has been shown to us and a great love is there for us. May it always be there for us, and may we always be witness to our Risen Savior. Amen.

**Prayer of Confession and Pardon:** God, you are with us even when we turn away from you. Guide us back into your loving arms. Judge us not by the perfection of our actions but show us mercy and love. We have strayed like lost sheep from your ways, failing both in what we have done and what we have failed to do. Bring us back into your fold that you may guide us and lead us in all things. For the sake of your Son, Jesus Christ, have mercy upon us and forgive us. May we walk in your love and trust your ways. May the Lord forgive all your sins and lift you up in love through Jesus Christ our Lord, and by the Holy Spirit keep you in life eternal. Amen.

**Offering:** If you are so moved to make an offering, you may send it to the church treasurer, or you may send it to the PO Box listed below. We are still the church, and the church still needs your support to keep doing all the important work that we do.

### **Lord's Prayer**

**Dismissal with Blessing:** May we go forth reflecting God's love in our lives as we go forth in the peace of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### **Our Current Series – Acts of Hope**

Our current series will be looking at the Acts of the Apostles during the Easter season, with each week bringing a new act for us to look at.

April 24th – Act of Witness – Acts 5:17-32

May 1st – Act of Change – Acts 9:1-20

May 8th – Motherly Act – Acts 9:36-43

May 15th – Act of Acceptance – Acts 11:1-18

May 22nd – Called to Act – Acts 16:9-15

May 29th – Unexpected Act – Acts 16:16-34

June 5th – Act of the Spirit – Acts 2:1-21

**Prayer List**

Rev Charliam Renner	Bishop Frank Beard	Our Conference	Our Healthcare Workers
Patti Corder and the Greenup Ambulance Crew		Angie Veach	Eric Veach
Ed & Verna Titus	Henry Catey	Jake Kiser	Cindy Cisney
Nancy Hoke	Don Wells	Tricia Adkins	Don Stewart
Ronnie Winstead	Dwight Parsons	Lauren Stewart	Phyllis Gable
Sage Martin	Dalton McFarland	Ruth Ann Finley	Jodie Bunch
Tom Finley	Laura Carlen	Judy McCellan	Rosie Chancellor
Susie Callahan	Kenny Holmes	Ted Marrs	Darrell Quick
Chuck Hogan	Brittany Gilbert	Mammoser Family	Family of Albert White
Richard Durham	Kathy Hanks	Wayne Carrell	
Gary & Mary Winterrowd	Leo Smith	Bonnie Hite	Sue & Bob Smyser
Larry Thompson	Greg Williams	Eloise Buffenmeyer	Martha Roberts
Charlie & Charlotte Baxter	Paul Schulte		

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