

This Life

2 of Easter

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Acts 5:12-20

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

What is this life all about? That's the question many young people today wonder and debate about on college campuses, among their friends and colleagues and with their families. Perhaps you yourself have tried to answer what this life is all about in your past, or perhaps you are struggling with that question even today.

There are many parts of this question, too. What is this life about? adds to it Who am I? How do I know things? What is power? And what is good?

Today we'll begin discerning the answers to these questions—yet you must first realize that you are no longer living the same life as those around us. You have been reborn in Christ. You are living a new life. Just like anyone else who has come to faith. But for those who have not been killed by the Law and drowned in the waters of Holy Baptism, they will continue to search for answers, but they will never reach the answers we have in God's Word.

Today we are not looking at the Doubting Thomas account, yet what is written on the back of your bulletins is a good place to start. Down at the bottom where it has "About the Cover" it says: "Jesus says that people who have not seen but still believe are blessed. Who are these people? They are us! Perhaps the sights and sounds of creaking pews, shuffling pages, and crying babies mask the spectacular work of God that happens on a typical Sunday morning. But God is blessing people wherever His Word is preached and believed (CPH, 2019)."

This morning we join our fellow Christian brothers and sisters as they witness God's work among them done by the apostles after Jesus' resurrection. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we will recognize that, with them, we share a new life—one based in and around God's Word and the Sacraments. Please turn with me to our First Reading text where we'll join our brothers and sisters in Christ.

Verse 1

"Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women..."

Signs and wonders were regularly done by the apostles and their numbers increased. Yet it was not these and wonders which made them believers any more than signs and wonders make believers today; it was the hearing of God's Word and the reception of the Sacrament which created and sustained faith as the Spirit of the Lord saw fit. How do we know this? From the fact that they were all together in Solomon's Portico. As we learn in Acts chapter three, this was a regular meeting place for the Christians to gather and hear the Word.

Now Solomon's Portico was right in the midst of the Temple court—even though the apostles had been threatened to stop speaking in the name of Jesus Christ. When our text says that "None of the rest dared to join them," it means that none of the Jews interfered with their services. Rather, "the people held them in high esteem." And apparently some of them or others from even outside Jerusalem had heard of the preaching and teaching of the apostles and "more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of men and women."

No doubt there were distractions in the Temple, just as there are in churches today. Yet the ones coming to faith and being kept in the faith by the working of the Spirit were not focusing on the crying of babies or the bleating of sheep or anything other than God's Word. In other words, they were not "[despising] preaching and His Word, but [were] holding it sacred and gladly [hearing and learning] it."

While there was no outward distinction since they were gathering to worship in the same place as the Jews, there was certainly a distinction in what was being taught and heard! The apostles were preaching Christ incarnated, crucified, risen, and living! And by preaching and teaching these things, the Spirit was adding to the number of those who believed daily to this new life.

Verse 2

"The people gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy, they arrested the apostles and put them in public prison."

The people from not only Jerusalem but even from the neighboring communities were coming in droves to hear the Gospel. But not the high priest and the Sadducees. They were not holding God's Word sacred and gladly hearing it. Rather they were despising preaching and His Word by not allowing it to be proclaimed. On

top of their preventing of the preaching of the Gospel, they added to it the sin of being jealous of the apostles' apparent fame.

Do you, dear friends in Christ, keep God's Word holy and sacred and gladly hear and learn it? This doesn't mean keeping your Bible dusted off so that when the pastor comes it looks perfect and perfectly clean. It means opening your Bible and reading it. It means coming to hear the Word preached and taught on a regular basis. And it means doing this joyfully.

Of ourselves, we would never have this desire. But we are no longer our own. Our Lord Jesus has given Himself up to death for us and has claimed us as His own. He called our names at our Baptism. He has called you and you are His child.

You are God's child in and through Jesus' work of redemption. You are taught that and all about your new life in Him in God's Word. So we no longer avoid God's Word but as saved children of God we eagerly desire and joyfully hear His Word—His Word which teaches us all that we were, all that we are, and that we are God's children, not of our own works, but by the works of Jesus Christ. Satan and the world and indeed our own flesh try to prevent us from hearing this Word, but God doesn't permit them to win. Even the high priest and Sadducees were unable to keep God's Word from being taught to His children.

Verse 3

“But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, ‘Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life.’”

What is this life all about? It's about the life and salvation we have received in and through Jesus' death and resurrection, through our Baptism, and which is maintained through continuing to hear His Word and receiving the Sacrament. It's about how God took on human flesh in His Son, Jesus Christ. How He was born of the Virgin Mary, lived a perfect life in our place, and was betrayed for each of us. It's about how Jesus was separated from God for every sin we have ever committed, every good we have ever omitted, and because we were nothing but poor, miserable sinners.

That's what we were—but now, by Jesus' death and resurrection, we are God's children. Now life is also about serving God and serving others. It's about coming and hearing His Word and receiving His Sacrament so that we might be kept in the one true faith to life everlasting. In Jesus' Name. Amen.