

Easter Worship Series: Acts of the ‘Sent Ones’
“All of Us are Witnesses”

Second Sunday of Easter: 27 April 2014
Sermon Text: Acts 2:14a, 22-32
First United Methodist Church
Arlington, Texas 76011

It was at the end of our public school stretch. We graduated and had a round of parties and so on. Finally, we fell into bed, took our rest, and then woke up sometime the next day. My friends and I all shared a common odd feeling. It seems that no one of us really knew what to do next. All the mandatory schooling was finally over, but no one really knew what to do next. And it was true. After the exhilaration, the sentiment, the expectation of graduation suddenly it was finished. No one had really prepared us for the ‘what next’ part. We were happy, but so unfocused—now. Hear the day’s lesson from Peter’s Pentecost sermon in Acts 2:

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 22 “You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— 23 this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law.

24 But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. 25 For David says concerning him, ‘I saw the Lord always before me, for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken; 26 therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced; moreover my flesh will live in hope. 27 For you will not abandon my soul to Hades, or let your Holy One experience corruption. 28 You have made known to me the ways of life; you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

29 “Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. 30 Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying, ‘He was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh experience corruption.’ 32 This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. Acts 2:22-32

I want to add this note to the text:

Before we look with a bit more care at the contents of this sermon, it is well to state one fact clearly: the conflict here is not Jew against Christian. The conflict is one between Jew and Jew. Nearly all those who heard Peter that day, at least in Luke’s retelling of it, were

Jewish. Why else would Peter say at Acts 2:29 when addressing his listeners, “brothers,” implying that he is an Israelite just as they are. The struggle here is an inner Jewish one, revolving around the proper understanding of just who Jesus is: prophet or Messiah. It will not be long, of course, perhaps less than a decade after Luke writes his works that a complete break between traditional Judaism and emergent Christianity will at last occur (this break may be signaled for us in John 9 and the story of the man born blind—from John Holbert’s Website on Patheos).

Commencement season will soon be on us. UTA will hold its festivities two weekends from now as will many other schools. The high school graduation scene will begin one month later. Graduation thoughts turn us back when we finally completed public school. Most people I know look back on high school as being some of the best years of their lives. But there is something of a misnomer in all of this. It seems that we confuse the end with the beginning—at least in the ways that we name things. For example, we call graduation “commencement” although we complete school and understand graduation as an end. But “commencement” really means beginning. Thus, this focus backward is not as important today as is our focus onward. The events catapult the disciples and us toward what comes next. For this reason of “what comes next” we look at Acts 2: 14a, 22-32.

In a nutshell, this part of Peter’s sermon tells listeners that

- 1) God attested to whom Jesus was with “deeds of power, wonders, and signs.”
- 2) Jesus was handed over as part of God’s foreknown plan.
- 3) “They” killed Jesus with non-Jewish accomplices.
- 4) BUT God raised him up—God freed Jesus from death and it had no power over him.
- 5) Next Luke has Peter quote Psalm 16:8-11.
- 6) Luke then contrasts the Davidic dynasty—the greatest in Israel’s history—with the new dynasty that God creates in Jesus. This new dynasty, of course, is the eternal church on the day of Pentecost in contrast to the nation of Israel which like any nation has its rising and falling.

An important part of our lesson has Peter exclaim: “This Jesus God

raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses” (Acts 2:32). There is power in Peter’s words and this power comes because Peter preaches about the power of the resurrection. The resurrection puts an exclamation point on God’s power revealed in raising Jesus.

What looked like the end of Jesus and his little gospel community, now initiates a new movement that will have twenty-one centuries of global influence. Perhaps the church’s influence waxes and wanes, but God sustains no other movement in human history as God has sustained the church. We may argue about human sexuality, theology, economics, politics, race, and all the rest . . . yet . . . the church of Jesus Christ is still here. In its best days the church continues to reach out to the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the naked, the sick, and those in prison (see: Matthew 25:35-36).

Our sermon title, “All of Us are Witnesses” must go hand in hand with our culture which always asks: “What’s in it for Me?” Every new modern generation has this as a fundamental question. Several sociologists have called one of these “Generation Y.” Stephanie Armour, wrote recently in *USA TODAY* about this generation, “They’re young, smart, brash. They may wear flip-flops to the office or listen to iPods at their desk. They want to work, but they don’t want work to be their life.” In this article, Bruce Tulgan, notes: “Unlike the generations that have gone before them, Gen Y has been pampered, nurtured, and programmed with a slew of activities since they were toddlers, meaning they are both high-performance and high-maintenance. They also believe in their own worth.”

Marshall Goldsmith wrote an article, “Getting to Know Gen Why” which addresses how to understand and embrace the “what’s in it for me generation”

in ways that will make them productive members of your business (from *Business*

Week, article forwarded by Rev. Brian Young).

As each generation comes on the scene, I suspect the previous generations have always had doubts about how their juniors will handle responsibility and the pressures of leadership in an ever changing world. Perhaps it ought to be a comfort to all of us that when Peter said, “This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses,” Peter gave us assurance. No matter who is in charge—regardless of which generation—the important thing for Christian believers to remember is simply that God raised Jesus from the dead. Because this is true whenever we ask the question then, “what is in it for me?” the answer is always and everywhere—God—and we are—and all of us are witnesses to this great, glorious, and enduring truth. Amen.

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