



Easter Worship Series: Acts of the ‘Sent Ones’
“What Should We Do?”

Third Sunday of Easter: 4 May 2014
Sermon Text: Acts 2:14a, 36-41
First United Methodist Church
Arlington, Texas 76011

Hear the day’s lesson, Acts 2:14a, 36-41:

But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them . . . Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.” Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, “Brothers, what should we do?” Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.” And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, “Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.”

So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added (Acts 2:14a, 36-41).

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Prayer: In the midst of a multitude of distractions and appeals to our partial attention, we pray that, O God, your words might speak to the depths of our souls. Let us capture the message you offer to us today through our worship and fidelity to your sacred story. In the name of the one who is the resurrection and the life, we pray. Amen.

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As many astute Bible readers know, the book of Acts recounts the stories of the apostles traveling about the Mediterranean world. Many sermons, sometimes called speeches, punctuate these apostolic journeys. Accordingly, Marion Soards discusses various ways scholars count these sermons/ speeches: “Dibelius recognizes twenty-four speeches,” while George Kennedy, “who is interested in the rhetorical dimensions of the speeches, discusses twenty-five speeches; but several of the speeches are not exactly the same as those cited by Dibelius.” Soards then lists thirty-six speeches or sermons from Acts (*The Speeches in Acts*, WJKP, Louisville, KY, 1994, pp. 18-22). Despite how we count, Acts has speeches and our lesson offers us a part of Peter’s major sermon.

Peter’s speech offers us key insights. For modern culture the Christian

faith seems ethereal and vague. Much theological language sounds slippery to those wanting concrete handles by which to understand life or rules by which to live. Peter's Acts 2 sermon achieves things that effective sermons do: the sermon confronts the world's idols, it leads to hearer's self-reflection, it calls for confession, and it offers words of gracious forgiveness. But Peter's sermon offers another crucial feature for listeners—it calls for response. Good sermons begin in careful listening: to the biblical text and to the faith community. Peter heard the cry: "What should we do?" and has an answer. Peter calls for a positive response to the gospel: "Repent, and be baptized." Stewardship is a faithful response to God's gifts of time, talent, and treasure. Positively, stewards use what God has loaned them to assist in the building up of God's earthly realm. Negatively, our gospel response avoids the forces that hinder God's claim on us. These claims function for modern people as idols did in Israel's day. Whenever we elevate nation, family, lust for material possessions, or unhealthy attachments to work, then we substitute God with an idol. Whether our graven images are dressed for modernity or not, they still remain idols.

Normally we Christians share our gifts and graces through our gifts to a congregation. Yet, when we do not know what to do, we tend to do nothing. Offering people ways to respond to the gospel is the essence of a good message. Peter accomplished this aim when he suggested that those who heard him stood in need of repentance and baptism. Peter gave them something to do—some direction!

When those gathered heard Peter's sermon and "were cut to the heart," they asked, "What should we do?" This is a question that every church and

all those who think of themselves as believers in Jesus Christ might rightly ask. What do we do as disciples in the Body of Christ? Peter says “repent and be baptized.” When God forgives sin then repentant believers receive the Holy Spirit. Here is another miracle: Peter’s sermon resulted in 3000 additional believers that day!

“What should we do?” This is a pragmatic question—one that suits our age. After all, knowledge becomes wisdom only after we put knowledge to a practical use. We believe in practicality. “What good is it,” we ask: thus we ask “What should we do?” Peter says this is what we do: “repent and be baptized.”

Repent simply means to turn away from one kind of life. It comes from a Greek word *metenoia* which simply means to “turn around.” Practically, Jesus saved us **from** sin and/or going in the wrong direction. But practically speaking Jesus also saves us **for** something. As we are saved from the past, God also saves us for a future. There is a difference between God saving us from something and God saving us for something.

For example, when John Wesley was caught in a fire at the Epworth rectory as a child, Wesley had an overwhelming sense that God had saved him not only from the fire, but that God had saved him for a purpose. God is more interested in where we are going than where we have been. God gives us a chance for salvation from sin and death. Thus, God saves us from something, but God does not stop there. God also saves us for something. God saves us for a life of meaning and value. God saves us to love others as God has first loved us. What has God saved you for . . . us for?

Several years ago I received a note after a sermon. One of our more astute members wrote: “About your sermon . . . while you are correct that we

cannot predict where our neighborhood or our church is going to be five, ten, or more years in the future, we can decide what kind of church we want to be. Do we want to be a country club ministering to ourselves or do we want to make a difference in our community?”

This is an exceptionally practical observation—and true. When we ask “What should we do?” we repent and/or turn from sin. But we also are baptized and walk toward the light—the light of Jesus as the Christ. Saved from and saved for is the practical action of God in Christ. “What should we do?” We repent of our sin and ask to be baptized into the body of Christ.

“What should we do?” we ask. Soren Kierkegaard once wrote, “Purity of heart is to will one thing.” Do you will to have a relationship with Jesus on a personal and heartfelt level? In your heart of hearts do you desire to be a faithful disciple? Do you wish to remove all the impediments in your heart that keep you from a personally satisfying relationship with God? Are you willing to forgive others and yourself for the failure to bind your heart to God? These questions accompany the question they asked Peter: “What should we do?”

David N. Mosser, FUMC, Arlington, Texas 76011

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