



LAKWOOD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

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TESTIMONY TO RESURRECTION

Acts 5:27-32

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²⁷When they had brought them, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, ²⁸saying, "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name, yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us."

²⁹ But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. ³¹ God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. ³² And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."

There is a box of empty plastic eggshells on my desk.
 A half-empty package of Starbursts on the couch.
 I might still have a bellyache from all of the chocolate I ate,
 And some saint of this church found a way to dispose of a vat of leftover pancake batter.

Yes, all of the Easter hoopla is over.
 Maybe you, like me, are still cleaning up a little bit.
 Still recovering from the massive celebration that is Easter.
 Maybe you have put it all away for next year.

But WE are here.
 And it is still Easter.

He is risen.
 he is risen!

Death is no more.
 Through the fear of Holy Week,
 the sorrow and terror of the cross,
 Dead and buried.
 He is alive.
 He is risen!

Now what?
 Easter Sunday part II.
 He is still risen.

In our story from Acts today, we get into the middle of what happened next for the apostles.
 Those first Easter witnesses.
 They have gone to speak of Jesus, to tell the story, to proclaim the gospel,

And ended up in more than a little trouble.

Peter, John and a few others stand before the council having been in and out of jail a few times.
But let's fill in some gaps to get us from the empty tomb to the council floor.

The risen Christ walked with them on the road to Emmaus.
Broke bread with folks.
Showed Thomas his hands.
Fished with folks.
Appeared here and here and here.
And then ascended to the Father.

The apostles begin to live the resurrection life.
To be witnesses to the resurrection has changed them
And their lives will declare it forever.
Their lives become testimony to resurrection.

It looks like this:
And they live in community.
They share all things in common,
Selling their possessions to support each other.
In Jesus' name, they heal the weak and the wounded.
They preach repentance – life change and compassion.
And they grow in number.

And the powers that be are mad.
Threatened.
These uneducated and ordinary men from Galilee were in the temple at Jerusalem
Teaching of God, usurping the temple authorities in the name of a man who had been crucified.
Preaching about resurrection of the dead.
They did not want news of the healings or of the resurrection to spread.
Such a thing was a threat to their own power.

And the apostles are risking everything now to live the resurrection life.
By their very being, they are challenging all kinds of authorities.

They are released.
More signs and wonders.
More followers and believers.

They are arrested again and an angel lets them out of jail in the middle of the night.
Again they are teaching at the temple.
A third time, they are arrested.

At this point, they stand before the council –
Some translations refer to it as the Sanhedrin.
These were temple authorities, mostly Sadducees
Who maintained delicate ties to the Roman empire in the interest of Israel's independence.

It is important to remember that they were the ruling elders at a time of unrest.

Already they have maintained power through the course of a number of political regime changes. They have weathered the rule of Herod under Rome and now work with Roman governors. They have worked to hold onto their power in the interest of Jewish religious freedom from Rome. SO to have another group out there, preaching something different, Asking the Israelites to change their ways and believe in resurrection threatened their security.

To protect their power, the Sanhedrin threatened back.

At the possible cost to their own life,
At the RISK OF DEATH
(verse 33: "when they heard this they were enraged and wanted to kill them")
The apostles continue to defy orders:
"we gave you strict orders not to teach in this name" say the high priest.
But they do.
And they will not stop.

Peter responds:
"We must obey God rather than any human authority."
And he tells the story briefly:
Jesus is Lord.
Jesus died.
And God exalted him.
He is risen.

He teaches in Jesus name right there on the spot.
At the RISK OF DEATH.

So, that's where we are.
And we, 2000 years later, are left to think about the council's anger and their fear,
And then to think about the apostles' risk and their courage.
"We must obey God rather than any human authority."

So who now, is the council?
And who now, is taking any risk for their faith?

Have you ever truly risked your life to be able to say "HE IS RISEN"?
There are those in our world who have.
But my guess is that very few of us in this room, if any, are among them.
We in America have constitutional protections allowing us to practice our religion,
While some might prefer we don't pray or baptize in school hallways or public places,
While we are asked to consider the faith traditions of others in our religiously diverse world,
We are not at risk of death here in America as Christians.

What is the council of our time?
The power that is protected?
How might our lives yield to God's in the face of those clinging to power?
No, we are not at risk of death,
But some parts of our lives can be put at risk.

The council makes the rules, and so we need to look at the rules around us.

If the council of our time is economic power,

We might obey God by refusing the next brand name item, seeking out fair trade products that are made by people paid a fair and living wage, giving more than we get, and finding our own worth outside of our net worth.

If the council of our time is political power,

We might obey God by being listeners rather than arguers, seeking the good and constructive in opposing viewpoints, and refusing to cling to bad ideas for the sake of party dominance.

If the council of our time is personal power,

We might obey God by yielding time, decisions, opinions, fame, or accolades to others.

And wait, if the council of our time is religious power...

If the council of our time is the church.

The religious authority that upholds and in some ways enforces the rules.

If the council of our time is the church...

That is us.

The elders and priests and the high priest.

Are we the ones in power, and are we desperately trying to defend that power?

Are there times when we try to protect what we have so much

That we miss what God is doing?

If the council of our time is the humanity of the church clinging to our own way or glory,
We might obey God by leaving concern for the afterlife in God's hands and living life here and now:
flinging our doors open wide, risking our own security, letting go of ways that don't respond to the stranger in our midst, letting things get a little dirty in the interest of loving anyone who shows up, no matter the messy implications.

The council struggles to maintain power.

The apostles struggle to LIVE LIFE.

They know power is not theirs.

They just want to live a resurrection life.

That is our task.

God's power does not ascend,

God's power descends.

Yields.

Makes room.

"We must obey God rather than any human authority"

The apostles were following Jesus' way and trusting in God's power.

Declaring Jesus Christ risen was a testimony to God's power.

And living out that trust in their everyday lives is what their testimony to the resurrection looked like:

Angel released them to teach "about this life" (vs. 20).

-economic equality

-healing

-risk

- courage
- trust in God's power enough not to claim it for themselves.

Where might you need to speak up in a way that is true to Jesus even when it challenges the established power or authority?

The bold and courageous risk is to give up our own power for the sake of God's kingdom.
 Hang with the outcast.
 Touch the untouchable.
 Listen to other those with whom we disagree
 Say the unpopular word.
 Give away our money.
 Etc. etc.

We live in a time that can make a person scared.
 The 24 hour news cycle that must have a continuous story,
 And fear sells,
 We humans act out of fear so naturally,
 Want to remind us just how much is threatened all the time.

But the challenge is to look not for security,
 But for what God is doing,
 To have courage in the face of fear,
 To know in the midst of it that there is hope,
 To trust in the God that raised Jesus Christ.

You are here the Sunday after Easter.
 Can you go beyond the words?
 After you say HE IS RISEN
 Can you risk your life – your wealth, your popularity, your security, trusting that God's power will sustain you?
 Can you live into the resurrection?

Not what I want, but what you want, O God.

Amen. And Amen.
