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Text: Acts 4:5-12
Sermon: Fallout
April 21, 2024

Acts 4:5-12

⁵The next day their rulers, elders, and scribes assembled in Jerusalem, ⁶with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, John,^[a] and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷When they had made the prisoners^[b] stand in their midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹if we are being questioned today because of a good deed done to someone who was sick and are being asked how this man has been healed,^[c] ¹⁰let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that this man is standing before you in good health by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth,^[d] whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead. ¹¹This Jesus^[e] is

‘the stone that was rejected by you, the builders;
it has become the cornerstone.’^[f]

¹²“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved.”

About her writing and her style of writing, the author Flannery O'Connor, said this: ‘When you can assume that your audience holds the same beliefs you do, you can relax and use more normal means of talking to it; when you have to assume that it does not, then you have to make your vision apparent by shock—to the hard of hearing you shout, for the almost-blind you draw large and startling figures.’ This is not unlike Mark’s gospel in which Jesus says he tells parables not so everyone understands and arrives at the right answer, but so that no matter where we might sit, we are challenged by the peculiar behaviors, customs, and characters in these stories and in the world Jesus creates for us. I tell you these stories, not so you will have it all figured out, Jesus seems to be saying, but so that you will continue to wrestle, to be challenged, to be puzzled, and to continue to wonder your way along as you follow me.

Such is a way of introduction to our passage in Acts here. It is technically a post-Easter text and post-Ascension text and even a post-Pentecost text. Jesus has ascended and a new movement of God through the power of the Spirit has been unleashed on the world. And even though the physical presence of Jesus is absent here, the ministry for which he came continues, with Peter and John teaching and healing and restoration and healing continuing forward in the power of the Spirit. The backdrop for this event is not some kind of fancy megachurch or retreat center of healing and

wholeness, but more likely happens in the backstreets of Jerusalem, outside of the major venues and places where respectable people would gather or be seen. Probably a small gathering where a good deed in the name of Jesus Christ was done when a need appeared in their paths. Peter and John continue Jesus' ministry of solidarity with and healing of all the wrong people and like their Teacher before them, it brings them into conflict with the religious establishment and those looking after order and social graces. The other back drop to this passage is the larger one not only of the local customs, but that of the Roman regime, where the emperor or Caesar of the time was lauded as 'Lord of the entire world,' and had no conception of a risen from the dead Galilean having any power whatsoever over Pax Romana and the vast legions, armies, and banners of Imperial Rome. The only kind of power was imperial power. The only kind of power was seen the number of war chariots and legions. The only kind of power was the ability to conquer vast territories.

So there is an absurdity to these accounts in Acts, that the power and presence of Jesus Christ continue to show up and transform people through a community as it breaks bread, remembers Jesus, participates and tries to carry on the kind of ministry he began, and loves the kind of people with whom he spent his time. Acts documents the rapid expansion of Easter, not through Roman imperial power or forcing the Christian faith into one culture, language, and way of life, but rather showing from the very beginning that the Christian faith is infinitely translatable and 'is to be conveyed into every language and culture of the world.'¹ Far from being a one off event, the resurrection of Jesus creates infinite ripples in the world, fallout that finds its way into people and cultures and tongues that are graced, transformed, and exalted by the power of Christ on the loose in the world and in their lives. The crucifixion and death of Jesus do not shut up this movement; Christ's resurrection emboldens and energizes these bands of people who were disillusioned or just trying to cope with the world as it was, and here in Acts, they cannot live in their disillusionment or within the sad structure of the world that was, but instead find themselves being put to use in the ongoing life of Jesus Christ. Peter's words are a clarion call. A person who was sick has been healed and restored to life, not because of the power the disciples possessed or because they had the right formula, but because they invoke the name of Jesus Christ, the power of the Resurrection, the undergirding presence of the Holy Spirit, that continues to reverberate in their lives and in the life of the world.

We tend to think of Easter is one day in the mid 30s AD long ago, but Acts suggest to us the event doesn't stop but is one long continuous resurrection that sweeps up the disciples into this movement and continues to form communities of various ethnicities, nationalities, languages, and cultures wherever it goes. It does not stop, the fact that

¹ Darrell Guder, *The Continuing Conversion of the Church*, 78-79.

we are sitting here in 2024 in a community gathered around font and table with praises on our lips and a desire to leave this place and love this world for Jesus' sake is another piece of the fallout of Easter, another ripple of Christ's ongoing resurrection. Wherever the resurrection ripples go they disrupt the conventional wisdom, they challenge accepted social norms, they offer a deeper understanding of who is our neighbor and who we are called to love. And more often than not, the community that is created by the risen Christ directs its attention and love toward people the rest of the world often dismisses or casts aside or pays no attention.

There is the saying that character is how you treat people who can't do anything for you. Like it is one thing to be nice to the postal carrier or hairdresser or the chef, but what about the person you had to call for IT support who is obviously from a foreign country or the person panhandling on the Avenue or the road construction worker holding up the stop sign right when you pull up. Jesus seems to not only humanize such lives, but calls us to humanize them as well and extend the fellowship of Christian community to them, to help such persons see that they belong, that they are a beloved child of God, and that they also have gifts to be put to use for the sake of Jesus Christ and the world God so loves. People who lived outside the legal codes, the social codes, and the cultural norms. Jesus saw them and enabled them to feel seen, to feel whole, to feel human. Jesus not only treated the presumed to be unclean as clean, the presumed to be unfit as fit, and the presumed to be unworthy as worthy, but in his own life and practice Jesus washed their feet, sat at table together, and Jesus liberated their full dignity and humanity so they might flourish and reflect his grace.

These resurrections not only happened in age away, but Christ continues to make such resurrections happen in our midst as well. That is what Peter testifies too in our passage from Acts. Easter continues; or Easter never stops. In the words of Rachel Held Evans, 'Death is something empires worry about, not something gardeners worry about. It's certainly not something resurrection people worry about....in the words of G. K. Chesterton, Christianity has died many times and risen again; for it had a God who knew the way out of the grave....'and so she reminds us that 'as long as Christians are breaking the bread and pouring the wine, as long as we are healing the sick and baptizing sinners, as long as we are preaching the Word and paying attention [to the world], the church lives, and Jesus said even the gates of hell cannot prevail against it. We might as well trust him, since he knows a thing or two about the way out of the grave.'²

In many ways, we prefer a life and a world where Christ just stays dead in the tomb. It is more predictable, stable, and sensical. Or maybe we would even be okay with one resurrection that we can celebrate, but it gets more threatening and disruptive and unpredictable when it keeps happening and the fallout continues and the ripples make their way to

² Rachel Held Evans, *Searching for Sunday*, 229.

us. But what happens when the resurrection fall out gets into us and those resurrection ripples reach us? Several years ago pediatric oncologist Dhruv Khullar wrote an article for the New York Times sharing that having a sense of purpose and meaning in one's life leads to more positive health incomes than pursuit of happiness or comfort or other amenities and leisure. The good life or trying to participate in a life that seeks to build the good life for all, may not always make us feel warm and fuzzy all the time, but he writes, it is better than trying to chase the elusive state of 'feeling good' or 'feeling happy' just for ourselves.³

“Strangely, what Easter does and keeps doing is to create a community that believes that it comes together not for personal religious enlightenment or to pursue our personal dreams, but to be a living attempt to exist as God's love letter to the world. Ultimately that is what happens to the person here in Acts 4, v. 9. The person finds that they are healed, whole, set free, their humanity is fully embraced and exalted through Christ's presence in the Easter community. They are set free to thrive. That is God's intention for us all. That is what Christ's resurrection fall out continues to do through us. Not just to create a community or church that thrives, but that creates a community and church who believes we are here to enable the people around us and outside of us and strangers to us, that we are here to help them all thrive for the sake of Jesus Christ our Lord, until those resurrection ripples reach everyone.

³ Dhruv Khullar, 'Finding Purpose for a Good Life. But Also a Healthy One,' *The New York Times*, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/01/01/upshot/finding-purpose-for-a-good-life-but-also-a-healthy-one.html>