

“Tell Me What I Need to Know Not What I Want to Hear”

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A young boy had just gotten his driving permit. He asked his father who was a minister, if they could discuss the use of the car. His father took him to his study and said to him, "I'll make a deal with you. You bring your grades up, study your bible a little and get your hair cut and we'll talk about it." After about a month the boy came back and again asked his father if they could discuss use of the car. They again went to the father's study where his father said, "Son, I've been real proud of you. You have brought your grades up, you've studied your bible diligently, but you didn't get your hair cut." The young man waited a moment and replied, "You know Dad, I've been thinking about that. You know, Samson had long hair, Moses had long hair, Noah had long hair, and even Jesus had long hair!", to which his father replied, "Yes, you're right, and they also WALKED everywhere they went!"

Since the Death, Resurrection and Ascension of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ the disciples have done quite a bit of walking and preaching as we look closely at the book of Acts. Over this season of Easter, I have had the opportunity to be in the pulpit at Wildwood Presbyterian Church. I have stuck with the lectionary (Year C) in the Book of Common Worship and more specifically stuck with the scripture readings from the book of Acts. In these scripture readings we learn a lot about the Apostle Peter and how he has gone through a transformation since Christ's resurrection. It seems obvious the disciples along with the few hundred people who saw the Risen Lord were profoundly impacted or transformed as was Peter. I also believe

the last words of Jesus before he ascended into heaven was significant was well. Acts Chapter 1 Verse 8.

But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

In Acts Chapter 5, the disciples, specifically Peter, makes a defiant stand for Jesus in front of the Jewish Council. The Council was less than pleased to say the least with the teaching and preaching of the risen Messiah. With God's help these men escaped prison and continued the mission of spreading the good news, that is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

In Acts Chapter 9 we encounter a peculiar situation near the town of Jabba. A female disciple, Tabitha (Dorcas in Greek) has died and Peter travels from a nearby town and resurrects her from the dead. After this miracle is performed Peter "*stayed in Joppa for some time with a certain Simon, a tanner.*" A tanner in this case isn't someone who likes to lie out in the sun on the beach. To Jewish people, a tanner was practically an outcast; Jewish law regarded the work as defiling, since it required working with animal carcasses, blood, and skins, which were ritually unclean, and, I would add, really smelled bad. That Peter, who was born and raised a Jew, would stay with a tanner not just for a night but "*for some time*" shows that he had begun to disregard some of the practices and beliefs he had been taught and that he'd clung to since he was a boy that he was learning were not essential to a personal relationship with God.

As we investigate the scripture reading today, we see that Peter is back in Jerusalem and is presenting a report to the church. Yet again we see Peter is receiving criticism. However, this time it's not what he is preaching. It is the group of people he is delivering the good news. Peter has been wining and dining and having fellowship with the gentiles. It is no coincidence that Peter who was still in Joppa at the time has a vision. Probably not a coincidence Peter had been called there to resurrect Dorcas and stay with the tanner. God always has a plan and more times than not this plan is bigger than we realize. Peter went to Joppa for more than bringing Dorcas back to life. He was there to bring the Gospel to a people the church in Jerusalem had deemed unworthy.

Can we see the Holy Spirit at work in Peter's meeting with the church in Jerusalem? In verse 15 Peter says "And as I begin to speak the Holy Spirit fell upon them..." Peter is not calling praise to himself or his actions, he gives credit to the power of the holy spirit in two very clear situations:

1. The importance of sharing the good news with the gentiles.
2. How the people of the church in Jerusalem started by criticizing Peter but in the end accepted that the gentiles were worthy of God's amazing grace.

What can we say about the Peter we knew before Christ was crucified versus the Peter we see in his ministry in the book of Acts? Sadly, many times we tend to focus on what people have done wrong more than what they have done right. For the longest time I remember Peter as the one denying Jesus three times. We are reminded of that every Easter. This action could not have been easy to live with. Like Peter, we all make mistakes, we are all sinners and must bear the burdens of the decisions

that we make. How do we get through it? Like Peter we must put our trust and faith in God. We must not forget our mission which is to spread the good news of God's grace and salvation to those we meet regardless of where they live, where they work, what color they are. It should bring us all comfort to know that we are not on this journey alone. God has a plan for all of us. We must put our trust and faith in him and be marveled at all his works in our lives and in others.

It has been 1,989 years since the death, resurrection and ascension of our Lord and Risen Savior. Yet here we are experiencing the life and ministry of Jesus Christ all these years later. It is believed up to 500 people including the apostles witnessed the resurrection. Yet here we are today, gathered in a place of worship talking about the Good News! 500 people then and over 2 billion people today. The Holy Spirit is alive and working. This my friends is the Good News! Amen.