



SERMONS AT SAINT MARK'S

THE VERY REV. STEVEN L. THOMASON, DEAN AND RECTOR
THE SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER, APRIL 28, 2019
ACTS 5:27-32; PSALM 150; REVELATION 1:4-8; JOHN 20:19-31

NOW WHAT?



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Acts 5:27-32 [*When the temple police had brought the apostles, they had them stand before the council. The high priest questioned them, saying, "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." But Peter and the apostles answered, "We must obey God rather than any human authority. The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior that he might give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit whom God has given to those who obey him."*]

Welcome to the Second Sunday of Easter!
Some of you may know this Sunday has traditionally been called Low Sunday, contrasted to Easter Day, when the countless

thongs wedge into the pews, overflowing into the aisles. Low Sunday. When you have your pick of pews, plenty of room to spread

¹ Papyrus of the Acts of the Apostles, written c. 80-90 CE. By Unknown - Berliner Papyrusdatenbank, P. 8683, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=40694833>

out, and there is a general exhale after all the hyped-up energy of Easter Day.

But calling it Low Sunday never made sense to me because there are many who do show up on the Second Sunday of Easter. You are here, right? I noticed. But I suspect you're not here to be seen, or noticed; you're here for other reasons. Good reasons. Your reasons.

I have a friend who once said this Sunday would be better called "Now What Sunday" rather than Low Sunday. The people who come this week are asking, Now what? After Easter Day, and the empty tomb, and majestic hymns, and the masses wanting to catch a glimpse of the Risen Christ in their lives, we show up to learn what's next. What's next for the bewildered disciples, and us? Now what?

The scriptures appointed for today help us in our search for the answer. In a stroke of brilliant wisdom, the crafters of the Lectionary pair this gospel passage of disciples huddled in fear behind locked doors with the reading from Acts that shows the same people courageously standing in the face of corrupted power.

We get a Risen Christ extending hands of peace and presence to any who doubt or do not understand. We get a beautiful confession from Thomas whose eyes are opened to the love of Christ creating space for

his doubt, even while inviting him, and us, into the wounded reality of that love.

And we get the apostles acting. If you have never read the Acts of the Apostles from start to finish, I would encourage you to do that. It's as good a tale as any from JK Rowling or Tolkien, or anything Hollywood has to offer. It answers the "now what" question for those first disciples and any who would follow in their footsteps.

We get just a glimpse in the passage read this morning, but let me set it up for you so we can situate this scene in the larger story.



1-A 14th Century Manuscript of Acts of the Apostles

It's helpful to know that Acts is the sequel to the Gospel of Luke, a companion book recounting the history of the church in its earliest days. Luke ends with the resurrection,

post-resurrection

appearances to the disciples, and Jesus' ascension into heaven, then the book of Acts picks up with the bewildered disciples still unsure how to answer the question "now what?"²

² By Antonius, a monk - Minuscule 223 (Gregory-Aland), Greek manuscript of the New Testament, Public Domain,

<https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=14060846>

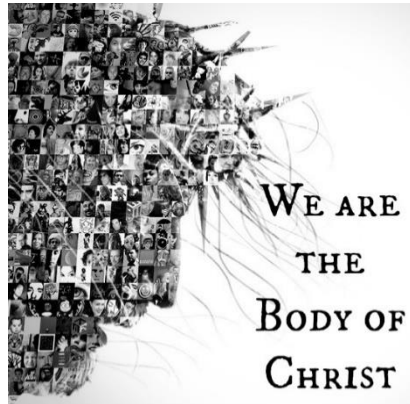
They receive the gift of the Spirit in remarkable fashion (tongues of fire and a roaring wind), then set about picking up where Jesus left off. Just weeks earlier they had betrayed Jesus, watched from a painful distance as he was killed, hid in fear, but here they are preaching and teaching about Jesus and the good news offered to any who would listen.

This emboldened message gets them in hot water with the authorities, who throw them in prison. There's a prison break that involves an angel (Luke likes angels), but instead of escaping they return to the temple to proclaim the good news some more so the next morning the religious authorities arrive for work only to find the same guys they threw in prison the day before standing there.

We pick up the story in the passage this morning—the authorities are nonplussed, exasperated. “Why do you keep talking about this Jesus when we told you to stop.” And Peter, no doubt with the cock's crow still singing his ears, declares “we must obey God rather than any human authority.” Here we stand, we can do no other. There's the “now what.”

Peter and the others had come to understand that they were the heralds of the good news, and were willing to share it with anyone, no count the cost.

I should tell you the second half of Acts deals mostly with Paul—not one of the apostles who knew Jesus, but one who through his own conversion experience (and it is a remarkable one!) becomes an apostle of Jesus Christ too.



<http://www.flowingfaith.com/2013/07/the-task-of-the-body-of-christ.html>

It is Paul who tells us later on, that when we live into the “now what” of following Christ, we become the Body of Christ here and now.

Being sent out as the Body of Christ offering the good news of resurrection hope to a broken hurting world is no small venture.

It takes courage, which is the attribute of wholehearted living for which all people yearn deeply.

That's what the word “courage” really means—living fully, authentically, wholeheartedly.

It doesn't remove fear from the equation. Dangers don't miraculously dissipate for those who follow Christ. We all know that.

But even in the face of danger, or injustice, or evil, wholeheartedness stands courageously as a different way, we'd say a Christ-like way.

This wholeheartedness is born from a sense of self-worth that arises from a keen sense of God's utter acceptance of us and of God's assignment of worth on our lives.

You are worthy; you are beloved, and that affords you the opportunity to be gentle with yourself—to honor yourself for what and who you truly are.

And if you honor yourself then authenticity arises naturally enough such that you are willing and able to reveal your true character to others.

No masks, no protective armor; just your true self, transparent, and yes, vulnerable—and therein lies the rub.

To live wholeheartedly and authentically means being vulnerable enough with others that they can hurt you, or even kill you, but you do it anyway, because that authenticity is

the “now what?” of life lived by the light of Easter.

In what I just described I used the verbs “arise” and “reveal” intentionally—they are resurrection verbs, action grounded in God's acceptance of you, God's assignment of worth on your life, God's laying claim on you and eternally inviting you into the mystery of the resurrection, which is the timeless infusion of God's consummate love into creation, in order that it is made new and whole—

Look for the ways that life *arises* and is *revealed* this week—in your life, in the world—and lay claim to those as signs that God is still at work, even here, even now.

Let the resurrection verbs act on your life, and trust that God's Spirit is stirring in you, for a purpose, calling you into the “now what” for which you were created.

Saint Mark's Cathedral lives in a grounded faith and spirituality; we seek to liberate people for ministry. We are grounded in ancient Christian scripture and tradition while at the same time remaining open to the insight and truth of contemporary life. You'll find Saint Mark's Cathedral actively involved in service and outreach to our community. Together we pray, worship, study the scriptures, and explore the richness of twenty-one centuries of Christian experience. Wherever you are on your journey of faith, you are welcome here!