

Third Sunday of Easter - April 19
Acts 2:22-43

Christ is Risen!

Christ is Risen, Indeed!

What should we do now?

In our text this morning Peter preaches. The crowds respond by saying, "What should we do?"

I suppose in one way or another that's why we come to church every Sunday. *What should we do? Or how should we live?*

We proclaim the risen Christ and try to notice what difference it makes -- In our life, in our world.

If you've gone to church for any amount of time then you're likely familiar with proclaiming Jesus. Even if you don't know what it always means, we're accustomed to Jesus being proclaimed as lord, as savior, as the messiah, as God-in-flesh.

But just because we're familiar with it, doesn't mean we can't still be confounded by it. Perhaps even shocked by it.

Our reading from Acts is from Pentecost.

The Holy Spirit has descended on a gathering of Jews in Jerusalem, and they all start speaking and are understood in their native tongues. It bewildered the onlookers to witness this clamor of sounds and speech. Indeed, many think it's just drunken revelers disrupting the early morning.

The confusion opens up space for an explanation.

It's Peter, the disciple, who was also once a denier, who raises his voice and becomes a proclaimer.

"Jesus of Nazareth." This is Peter's proclamation and explanation for what's happening.

What a strange and unlikely proclamation that is.

Jesus, from the small insignificant village of Nazareth. Who smelled of the fisherman who accompanied him and got himself kicked out of the same small, insignificant village that raised him.

Jesus, who wandered the roads preaching a kingdom while offending the educated and wealthy and eating with sinners. Who just several weeks before had marched into Jerusalem on a Donkey, and then got himself killed by the Romans.

But that's where Peter starts. And the crowds know who Peter is talking about. They heard the rumors, perhaps some even witnessed the signs and wonders -- the healings and the teachings. And they all know about the crucifixion. How Jesus was handed over to the Romans and executed as "King of the Jews."

And Peter does something quite daring. He points his finger at the crowd and says, "You helped crucify him." You're responsible for his death.

Now let's tread carefully here. This is a little precarious terrain.

This isn't Peter blaming the Jews. Peter's a Jew; of course, Jesus was a Jew.

This is Peter saying to the Jews in the crowd, "remember who you are!" You are not Roman subjects, you are Jews. But because you have assimilated both your minds and bodies to the Roman empire, you're

caught up in the machinery of death; the same power that crucified Jesus is that same power that holds you captive.

But there's another possibility, there's another world that's possible, Peter is saying.

The crucified Jesus has risen through the power of God. The true power of this world is not the one that sought to erase Jesus' body, along with his message and memory. No, the true power in this world is revealed in the crucified body of Jesus who has been freed from death, whose tomb is now empty.

Peter's initial accusation: you are responsible for Jesus's death, is now an invitation: quite being subjects of the Roman empire. That power you fear is simply a shadow, a mirage, an illusion.

Be who you actually are, God's people, subjects of the kingdom, bearers of God's spirit.

We must understand this as a provocation, an act of incitement against the imperial powers of Rome. Peter is picking up right where Jesus left off when he appeared on trial. Insisting his kingdom was not of this world and so could not be contained or conquered by the empires of this world.

This is a kingdom of the Spirit.

There is no territory to defend; only land to tend.

There is no ethnic nationality; only neighbors to care for.

There is no military to call to arms; only disciples who break bread together and share with the hungry, the thirsty, the captive.

There are no enemies to defeat; only enemies to convert and love.

There is no test of citizenship; there is only repentance and the pure waters of baptism.

There are no taxes to be paid; only gifts to share.

There is no throne upon which the king rules; just an empty tomb from which all are set free.

Peter's listeners are "cut to the heart." They are wounded and disoriented. What they thought was true about their world, can no longer be sustained. Their world has broken. The victim of the Empire's crucifixion, is now revealed as the power that gives life to the Universe.

They are now caught in-between. No longer able to sustain their old world; they must learn to inhabit a new one. But how?

"What should we do?"

"Repent and be baptized," says Peter.

And thousands did repent and were baptized.

"Awe came upon everyone, because many wonders and signs were being done by the apostles. All who believed were together and had all things in common; they would sell their possessions and goods and distribute the proceeds to all, as any had need. Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous* hearts, praising God and having the goodwill of all the people."*

I doubt we should read this as a program or a formula we're meant to emulate precisely.

This is the disruptive event; the moment of God's kingdom interrupting into our world. An event that can't be managed or owned or systematized.

It is the event to bear witness to. To proclaim with joy that God's kingdom is here and is coming. There is enough. There is more bread to break, more

meals to eat, more communities to gather, more love to sustain us, more resources to share. We are no longer citizens of this world's empires, we are no longer beholden to their powers. The crucified one is the Risen One.

Christ has Risen, Christ has risen, Indeed!