

Believe

Psalm 16

Acts 2:14a, 22-32

A quick recap to get us started. Jesus has ascended to heaven and as promised has sent the Holy Spirit to enable the disciples to carry on the work He started. In the locked upper room, having just chosen Matthias by lot to replace Judas Iscariot as a disciple of Christ, a great wind blows through the room and tongues of fire descend on the gathered disciples. Each begins to speak in a foreign tongue. Filled with the Holy Spirit, the disciples, now apostles, spill out into the streets of Jerusalem where the Jews, gathered together for the Passover festival, hear the witness of these men, each in their own language. And not only Jews, for when Peter begins his address he speaks to, “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem” Acts 2:14b.

The biblical text establishes that it is a large crowd that Peter addresses. It is a crowd composed of not just those who are Jewish by birth, but also converted Jews, as well as Gentiles. We do well to remember that just as not everyone in our community is a Christian, neither was everyone in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus a Jew. There were Gentile merchants and, of course, all the Roman administrators and soldiers that also resided in Jerusalem. The crowd that Peter is addressing is rather diverse.

To begin his address, Peter references a prophecy of Joel that said:

Acts 2:17-18 (NIV2011)

¹⁷ “ ‘In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on *all* people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams.

¹⁸ Even on my servants, *both men and women*, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.

Right from the outset, Peter makes clear that this is a message for *ALL* people. May those with ears hear the message that he brings! He sets out very methodically the facts regarding Jesus that will lead many in the crowd to turn their hearts and ask for baptism. His is a seven-point message all summed up in three simple sentences.

Acts 2:22-24 (NIV2011)

- 1) Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him,
- 2) as you yourselves know.
- 3) This man was handed over to you by God’s deliberate plan and foreknowledge;
- 4) and you put him to death by nailing him to the cross,
- 5) with the help of wicked men

- 6) But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death,
- 7) because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him.

The name, Jesus of Nazareth, was enough to get their attention. He was well known among the people, the ones who had witnessed the many miraculous things he had done. Peter drives home this fact by saying he did these things among *you*. There was to be no denying that the people knew not only about Jesus but *knew* who he was and the works he had accomplished in their midst. Despite the religious leaders claims that Jesus was in league with the devil, had not the man born blind given glory to God when he responded to the council when asked who had healed him:

John 9:30-33 (NIV2011)

³⁰ The man answered, “Now that is remarkable! You don’t know where he comes from, yet he opened my eyes.

³¹ We know that God does not listen to sinners. He listens to the godly person who does his will.

³² Nobody has ever heard of opening the eyes of a man born blind.

³³ If this man were not from God, he could do nothing.”

With Jesus' divinity established, Peter moves on to the fact that these same people were complicit in bringing to fruition the prophecy spoken so long ago. How fearful it must have felt as the realization set in that they themselves had called for the murder of the Son of God! While the Jews had not actually put Jesus to death, there was no law that allowed them to do so, they still had worked in concert with other wicked men to bring about Jesus' demise. If the cross were a gun, the Romans may have pulled the trigger, but the Jews had supplied the bullets.

I can begin to feel the heaviness those within earshot of Peter might have been feeling. They reflected on the good things that Jesus had done, and the benefit many of them had received from him. These same people who willingly chose to release Barabbas and gave Jesus up to the Romans to crucify on a cross, and now that same Jesus, the one they had despised was raised from the dead! And he was raised not by his own power, but rather by the power of the Lord God Almighty. Is anyone looking over their shoulder for a lightning bolt with their name on it yet?

To put the final exclamation point on his speech, Peter ends by quoting King David:

Psalm 16:8-11 (NIV2011)

⁸ I keep my eyes always on the LORD. With him at my right hand, I will not be shaken.

⁹ Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also

will rest secure,

¹⁰ because you will not abandon me to the realm of the dead, nor will you let your faithful one see decay.

¹¹ You make known to me the path of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence, with eternal pleasures at your right hand.

Peter calls the attention of the people to the prophecy spoken by David about not only the coming Messiah, but the resurrection of that same Messiah. Now Peter and the other apostles were giving witness to the fact that God had raised Jesus to life and that the Holy Spirit had been sent to them, just as Jesus had promised. Not only that, they gave their witness in all the languages of the people gathered in Jerusalem. This is the reversal of the curse given at Babel, where once the language of the people was confused and they scattered each to their own land. In this moment, all people were united in hearing the good news in their own tongue.

The crowd is understandably cut to the heart by what they have heard, and they entreat Peter to tell them what they must do now to be saved. His message is simple, repent and be baptized. Hearts were changed and many of them responded to Peter's message.

We're all familiar with this story, aren't we? We say, "How wonderful that 3,000 people responded to Peter's message." Why wouldn't so

many come to Jesus? Peter was talking about someone they had all seen, heard, or possibly even touched. How much more difficult is it for those who did not walk the same streets as Jesus, who have not sat on a hillside as he spoke the Beatitudes, or witnessed his healings of the blind, the lame, and the leper?

Again, the biblical story tells us that it wasn't that easy, even for those who knew Jesus to believe that he was raised from the dead. One of the lectionary readings for this week is the story of Thomas. We know that the first time Jesus appeared to the disciples in the upper room, Thomas was absent from the group. When he is told by the others that Jesus is in fact alive, he states he will not believe unless he can see and touch Jesus for himself. Fortunately, Thomas doesn't have to wait long for this opportunity as Jesus appears within the week and Thomas gets his wish granted of seeing the risen Christ.

At this meeting, Jesus affirms Thomas' belief and goes a step further when he says:

John 20:29 (NIV2011)

²⁹ ... "Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed."

Who is Jesus referring to as those who have not seen? It would be all those who would hear the testimony of the apostles in the years to come, all those who would read or hear the letters written by Peter, Paul and

John, all those who would stand in grand cathedrals and country churches for hours as the Word of God was preached, all those who huddled around candles or lanterns to read the Word from the first printed Bibles. We are among the ones Jesus speaks of who have not seen, yet we believe.

At a later date Peter wrote a letter that we have recorded in our Bibles as 1 Peter and in it he says this:

1 Peter 1:3-9 (NIV2011)

³ Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,

⁴ and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you,

⁵ who through faith are shielded by God's power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time.

...⁸ Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy, ⁹ for you are receiving the end result of your faith, the salvation of your souls.

Because we have the testimony of such credible witnesses as the apostles, we too can know who this Jesus is and so believe. When we believe, our hearts are changed, and we are saved. In believing we reap

the many blessings poured out by the Father. And while we cannot see Jesus, we do love him and look forward to the day when our faith will be rewarded. Give praise to God for His gracious gift, Jesus Christ!

Closing Prayer

*May grace and peace be ours in abundance,
in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord.*

*May we be thankful for simple things,
for friendship, for health, for daily bread, for good news.*

*May we rise above the corruption of power
and become participants in the divine nature.*

*May we go forward
to pursue goodness, wisdom, holiness and love.*

God the Creator, call us to the work of the kingdom

God the Redeemer, keep us from stumbling

God the Sustainer, transform and inspire us.

In Jesus name we pray, Amen.

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