

Troubling Troublemakers!

Acts 5

A Less Familiar Story Retold for Holy Humor Sunday

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Hudson United Methodist Church

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THE FAMILY CIRCUS

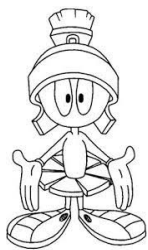


"Yesterday is the past, tomorrow is
the future, but today is a gift.
That's why it's called the present."

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For both on-line and in-sanctuary worship, this sermon was written to follow our own Kathy O'Brien Schroder and her Lucy Goosey retelling the story of Jesus' resurrection just as Lucy heard it from her ancestors, Lena and Fritzzy. Kathy and Lucy are a tough act to follow, but as an aspiring ventriloquist I will give it my best, both on-line and in-sanctuary. Acts 5, today's New Testament reading, has a plot much like a Looney Toons cartoon, therefore I have invited Marvin the Martian to help me retell that story in a modern way this week. Doing ventriloquism with Marvin the Martian should be easy because Marvin the Martian does not have a mouth, and his humor relies completely on sight gags. (My dear sermon reading friends, have you ever tried to write a sight gag as an essay?)

Marvin the Martian always had to play the bad guy on television because as the Looney Tunes star, Bugs Bunny always plays the good guy.¹ As an actual Martian, his



cartoonists created Marvin's armor to resemble Roman military armor used by the order named for their god of war, Mars. What if Marvin the Martian had an earthling cousin a Roman soldier who heard Peter say to the High Priest, "We must obey God rather than any human." (Acts 5:29ⁱⁱ) After all, if Lucy Goosey's aunt and uncle could have witnessed the resurrection, couldn't Marvin the Martian's cousin have heard Simon

Peter preach?

Readers, as we begin our drama of the mind Peter and the other disciples were teaching about Jesus' teaching, death, and resurrection at the main entrance of the Temple in Jerusalem. (Acts 5:12-18) Foot traffic may have been brisk usual since the curtain separating the Holy of Holies from the people has been torn in two when Jesus died on the cross. (Matthew 27:45-54) Probably lots of folks wanted to peek inside before the massive drape could be repaired. Hiding in plain sight is such a Bugs

Bunny thing to do, I will take the Bugs Bunny and blend in with the apostles. Marvin the Martian will be a Roman guard nearby.

Rev Dawn, voicing Marvin badly: At your command, madame.

Rev. Dawn (*as herself*): The High Priest was outraged. He had the disciples, Peter as their ring leader especially, arrested, and jailed, perhaps by Marvin's earthling cousin.

Marvin (*voiced from off stage*): That's right. He was on day watch when those troubling troublemakers were arrested and locked up.

Rev. Dawn (*shocked that Marvin speaks*): You had a cousin there?

Marvin: You said so and preachers don't lie. It is the ninth commandment, "Neither shall you bear false witness against your neighbor." (Deuteronomy 5:20)

Rev. Dawn (*still shocked*): That's true.

Marvin: Get back to the story.

Rev. Dawn: As I said, Peter and the others were arrested and jailed.

Marvin (*interrupting*): When my cousin was on the day watch.

Rev. Dawn (*Rolls her eyes in acknowledgement*): That night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors, brought them out, and said "Go, stand in the temple and tell the people the whole message about this life." (Acts 5:20, NRSV)

Marvin: I cannot confirm that anything of that sort occurred. My cousin was on the day watch, not the night watch.

Rev. Dawn: (*to Marvin*) Good to know. (*Continuing*) When the sun was up, Peter and the others were back at the temple's main gate telling the people about Jesus' resurrection and teaching his teachings. At the exact same time, the temple police were arriving at the jail to bring the prisoners to the High Priest for interrogation. (*Small silence.*) Ahem. Your line.

Marvin: My cousin had just reported for his watch. He took the temple police down to the same cell where he had locked those troubling trouble makers the night before. Every door from the entry to their cell was secure. But when Cousin Evan . . .

Rev. Dawn (*interrupting*): Cousin Evan?

Marvin: Yes, Evan the Earthling. Now may I continue, or shall I lock you up?

Rev. Dawn: No need. Go ahead.

Marvin: When Cousin Evan unlocked the cell, the cell was empty. Cousin Evan had to stay with the temple police as they all looked for those troubling trouble makers. The entire patrol back traced their steps from the day before and found the prisoners back at the temple entrance making more trouble.

Rev. Dawn: Are you sure the disciples were the troubling trouble makers?

Marvin: Authorities are always right.

Rev. Dawn: If you say so. Go on.

Marvin: Those troubling troublemakers were again taken into custody. Evan escorted the prisoner Peter himself. This time the temple police took them straight to the High Priest. The doors were closed for the interrogation.

Rev. Dawn: And who did the interrogation?

Marvin: The High Priest Caiaphas. He looked those troubling trouble makers straight in the eye and said, (Drops voice to imitate Caiaphas) “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 make us responsible for his crucifixion?”ⁱⁱⁱ

(*Big pause*) Are you doing Peter? Bugs Bunny is in the wings if you can’t.

Rev. Dawn: No need for Bugs. Peter is my faith ancestor. (*Sight gag with puppet Marvin the Martian*) “We must obey God rather than any human authority. . . . We are witnesses to (Jesus’ life and death and new life after death). And so is the Holy Spirit who God has given to those who obey him.” (Acts 5:32)

Marvin (shocked): The prisoners were acting on orders from God?

Rev. Dawn: They were. Do either apostles or preachers lie? Ninth commandment you know.

Marvin: (*Rev Dawn has Marvin do stunned silence as best she can. He is only a hand puppet.*) I don’t think Evan the Earthling knew the apostles do not lie.

Rev. Dawn: That’s common among Earthlings, be gentle with Evan. I was shocked that the High Priest only wanted to know why Peter was disobeying him. Caiaphas never asked Peter how they walked out of a lock jail. Still, when Peter answered there was one Pharisee listening who realized God was the true authority.

Marvin: And who was that?

Rev. Dawn: Gamaliel, whose father, Simeon, had recognized baby Jesus as the Christ. Hearing Peter reply so faithfully, Gamaliel realized that if Peter was listening to God's orders, no human had the authority to hold Peter and the others as prisoners. Gamaliel understood that the only way to make the Christ's message go away was to ignore it. Gamaliel knew that if Peter really was a messenger from God, even ignoring him could not make his message go away.

The high priest respected Gamaliel's wisdom and decided instead to set Jesus' disciples free. Even if he thought he was right and they were wrong, Caiaphas knew in this conflict, only the person doing God's plan would be remembered in history. You can read it yourself in Acts chapter 5, verses 33 through 42.^{iv}

Marvin: The authority was God? Not Peter?

Rev. Dawn: It was.

Marvin: But that means the High Priest was the troubling troublemaker!

Rev. Dawn: It does.

Marvin: What happened to him?

Rev. Dawn: I don't know, you seen Peter is our faith ancestor and we keep telling our family story, the story ". . . that never ends!"^v

Marvin: Amen.

ⁱ Marvin the Martian was introduced in the *Haredevil Hare* (1948) See *Wikipedia citation on Marvin the Martian*.

ⁱⁱ All Scripture quotations are taken from New Revised Standard Version, translated in 1989.

ⁱⁱⁱ Actual quote from the NSRV is ". . . determined to bring this man's blood on us." But because there are children hearing the YouTube and sanctuary versions, this phrase was made plain for them.

^{iv} The High Priest had the disciples whipped before releasing them, but again there will be children listening on-line and in-sanctuary.

^v A line Kathy and I learned as girls from the late, great ventriloquist Sherry Lewis and Lambchop, "This is the song that never ends/ Yes, it goes on and on my friend . . ." As a three-year-old girl, I had no idea how to spell Sherry Lewis, let alone make an endnote to cite her great thought.