

April 26, 2015
Sermon for Fourth Sunday of Easter
St. Peter Lutheran Church
Bowie, TX
Larry Knobloch, Pastor
Acts 4:1-12

J.J.- Jesu Juva—Help me, Jesus

Acts 4:1–12 (ESV)

¹ And as they were speaking to the people, the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees came upon them, ² greatly annoyed because they were teaching the people and proclaiming in Jesus the resurrection from the dead. ³ And they arrested them and put them in custody until the next day, for it was already evening. ⁴ But many of those who had heard the word believed, and the number of the men came to about five thousand. ⁵ On the next day their rulers and elders and scribes gathered together in Jerusalem, ⁶ with Annas the high priest and Caiaphas and John and Alexander, and all who were of the high-priestly family. ⁷ And when they had set them in the midst, they inquired, “By what power or by what name did you do this?” ⁸ Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, said to them, “Rulers of the people and elders, ⁹ if we are being examined today concerning a good deed done to a crippled man, by what means this man has been healed, ¹⁰ let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well. ¹¹ This Jesus is the stone that was rejected by you, the builders, which has become the cornerstone. ¹² And there is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved.”

Grace, mercy, and peace from the one who touches our lives, our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

Among the high and mighty of the earth there has always been an ultimate solution for almost any sort of issue, any stubborn thorn in some powerful side.

I'm speaking about death—the power by which Satan holds the whole world captive, as Hebrews 2 reminds us (v 14).

Offing or killing an opponent has frequently proven a tempting option for someone with a lot of power and not much conscience.

Biblically, we can't help but think of King Saul, whose absolute power was matched only by his jealousy of David, the son of Jesse.

David was popular, *too* popular. Time and time again, Saul tried and failed to apply the age-old political solution of death to his "David" problem.

But time and time again, David was delivered. Sadly, King David himself would later effectively and sinfully wield death for political and personal ends. The Scriptures are not known for hiding the sins of our biblical heroes.

In what would prove the low point of his life, King David had fathered a child by a married woman who was not his wife. Public scandal was sure to follow when news got out. Public repentance was apparently not on David's agenda. And so it naturally occurred to him that he could fix it all . . . if he would only kill Uriah, whose wife David had effectively stolen.

And so David did.

Before we get all high and mighty, our society uses death to solve "birth"

problems mundres of time a day as we murder unborn children through elective abortion because they are inconvenient or embarrassing.

It's noteworthy that the man who wrote the Psalm 23 is the same man who also, wrote Psalm 51: *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot out my transgressions"* (v 1).

He speaks here of adultery with Bathsheba and his murder of convenience, Uriah.

Of course, these were not the first times it had dawned on someone powerful that death could be put to convenient use, nor would it be the last.

Even so, innocent blood has a way of speaking out and even humbling those who spill it. That was true in the case of Uriah and David.

It was true of Jesus and His persecutors too.

Our text in Acts opens with the Jewish leaders rushing to the temple courts, greatly annoyed and perplexed to find that death had not solved their "Jesus" problem.

Not long before, they had all released a great sigh of relief as they watched Jesus of Nazareth breathe His last.

The competition, the threat to their lifestyles was disposed.

All could go on as before. Or so they thought.

Today, they discover Peter and John have healed a lame man in Jesus' name.

Worse, the apostles are publicly proclaiming Jesus with every breath in their lungs—proclaiming Him alive and calling for repentance:

“God, having raised up his servant, sent him to you first, to bless you by turning every one of you from your wickedness” (Acts 3:26).

Thousands heard and believed.

At first, things proceed along the age-old pattern.

Arrests are made. A solemn assembly gathers. An implicit threat of death hangs over Peter and John. But things have drastically changed since Easter morning.

Peter and John are not afraid. Christ is Risen.

Death is no longer an issue.

When asked how the lame man standing before them had been healed, Peter boldly explains: *“Let it be known to all of you and to all the people of Israel that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead—by him this man is standing before you well” (v 10).*

Not only had death **not** solved their Jesus problem, but Jesus also had created for them a problem **with** death.

They now had a life problem.

The threat of death wasn't working.

In Christ, death had backfired and unleashed forgiveness, restoration, and life.

Here was bloodshed speaking a better word than the bloodshed of Abel, and here was an empty tomb making itself felt even in high, mighty hearts.

How do you control people who aren't afraid to die?

Eventually, the leaders feebly resort to charging Peter and John to be quiet about Jesus.

Sort of like a policeman without a gun ordering a bank robber to halt.

“Stop...or I’ll say ... stop again.” No power, no threat.

So Peter and John frankly refuse: *“Whether it is right in the sight of God to listen to you rather than to God, you must judge, for we cannot but speak of what we have seen and heard”* (4:19–20).

How do you feel as you consider all of this?

Initially, it’s natural to feel excited and encouraged.

However, the more we look at it, perhaps we should also somewhat ashamed.

It’s easy to feel ashamed at how sheepish we are when we have such grounds for boldness. It is ours in Christ.

The resurrected Good Shepherd is at your side, and yet, we go through life as nervous and fearful as a lamb, alone in the woods, worrying away our days away.

The very vanquisher of death has declared Himself through Baptism to be for YOU! Jesus is your deliverer, yet the very mention of illness or cancer can make us tremble.

And then there’s the idea of persecution. I don’t imagine I’ll ever be dragged before rulers and authorities and threatened with death if I refuse to be quiet about Jesus, but such things do happen today.

There continue to be men and women who stand up to worldly power and give witness with their lives to the one who is stronger than death.

And here I am, sometimes lowering my voice to a whisper when leading a table prayer in public, almost fearful about letting the waiter hear me speak to

Jesus. How many of you are completely innocent?

Christ, have mercy on your sheep!

And then we remember: He has; He does have mercy; He does forgive.

This is also what it means that He is the Good Shepherd—not only that He is infinite in power, unstoppable in death, and able to deliver, but also that this mighty, living Savior, who knew our sin before we were conceived, willingly laid down His life for such timid, sinful sheep as you and I are. “I am the good shepherd,” we heard Him say today in John’s Gospel.

“The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep” (Jn 10:11).

Do we appreciate how profound that is?

Do we remember who these sheep are of whom Christ speaks?

He is talking about David, adulterer and murderer of humble Uriah.

He is speaking of Peter, who denied Him three times, even *swearing, “I do not know the man.”*

He is speaking of John, who wanted a preeminent throne at Christ’s right hand until Good Friday, when the thrones turned out to be crosses. Then, in fear, John locked himself away with the others, despite the Lord’s word that death could not contain Him.

He is speaking of you, who finds other things to do on Sunday mornings that enter into His presence in worship and praise. Or who writes things off to luck and personal skill rather than giving God the glory for His good gifts. Or we who might have been there with Peter for the many times that we have denied Jesus in our words and actions.

Some flock our Good Shepherd has.

But this is who Jesus is, the Good Shepherd who loves the sheep, no matter their sins; who pursues the sheep to draw them back to His fold; the Good Shepherd, who lays down His life for His sheep—sheep like you and sheep like me.

What sweet and comforting Gospel!

A Mighty Good Shepherd who has defeated sin and death...and He did it all, gave it all for His sheep...for you and for me.

It is because King David had tasted God's infinite mercy and had seen ahead to the one who *wields* the rod and staff that he found comfort in them and finally walked through the valley of the shadow of death without fear.

It is because Peter and John not only saw the resurrected Christ but also had received His restoration of forgiveness and His Word of peace that they were bold to testify powerfully in His name.

It is because you have passed through the waters of Holy Baptism, been marked as one of God's children and been given the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Our Good Shepherd can and will give us the strength to carry forward into our own lives and witness to those around us, sometimes even without our noticing, but our Good Shepherd never leaves us behind, never leaves us nor forsakes us. In this knowledge of our forgiveness and promise of life eternal, we can face whatever the world might throw our way.

We have a *very* Good Shepherd indeed.

Thanks be to God!

Amen.

The Peace of God which passes all understanding, keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus!

Amen.

Soli Deo Gloria – To God alone be the glory

Sermon Outline

A Very Good Shepherd Indeed

Acts 4:1-12

1. Some see death as a solution to a problem.
2. With Jesus' resurrection, those who counted on a death solution now had a life problem.
3. Our mighty Good Shepherd is also merciful to us. Our sins are forgiven and death is no problem.