

The Power of Christ's Resurrection (Acts 4:1-12)

Imagine the frustration of living in a “whack-a-mole” world, where you think you’ve dealt with an issue only to have it pop up again in a new location. I don’t believe there is an aramaic or greek word for “whack-a-mole,” but the concept might have been what Annas and Caiaphas felt when they got wind of Peter and John speaking to a large crowd gathered around them on the Temple grounds. You’ll remember that Annas and Caiaphas, Jewish chief priest and high priest respectively, were key figures in the plot that resulted in the crucifixion of Jesus. They had negotiated the price of betrayal with Judas, condemned Jesus in a mock religious trial under cover of night, manipulated Pilate politically, stirred up the populace against Jesus in the public trial, and paid off the guards at the tomb to spread a false story of Jesus’ disciples stealing his body from the tomb. They thought they had covered all their bases in getting rid of this upstart rabbi who had disturbed the status quo. But then, Peter and John show up at the Temple to pray and in the name of Jesus Peter healed a 40 year old man lame from birth who was causing such a commotion in his jumping and leaping in praise that a curious crowd gathered, which Peter addressed proclaiming the reality of Christ’s resurrection and pointing out this power for life promised to those who trust Jesus.

Annas and Caiaphas must have thought, “oy vay, this again?”

As the passage tells us, the apostles were arrested and jailed overnight. The following morning, all the principals of the religious leadership convened a hearing to challenge the authority of the apostles for their action and, by implication, their teaching.

It’s interesting to note the change in demeanor from just a few weeks earlier. Back then it was the religious leaders who were calm and deliberate in their actions while the apostles were disturbed and fearful. You’ll recall that it was in the very courtyard of Caiaphas that Peter had stumbled in faith denying any knowledge of Jesus. But now, the tables had turned—we see the calm, non-anxious presence of Peter confidently testifying to the truth of Christ’s resurrection before the disturbed and troubled leaders. What would account for this? Nothing less than full assurance of Christ’s resurrection on the basis of personal experience. Peter had seen, been in the presence of, spoken with, and shared a meal with the risen Jesus. The disbelief or incredulity of opponents doesn’t repudiate the reality of Christ’s resurrection. Neither can it prevent or contain the effect of it, and that reality might well have been the idea the religious leaders were trying to chase from their minds as this unfolded.

The apostles weren’t out to undermine the Temple—they’d gone there to pray. The apostles weren’t out to discredit the authorities—in fact, they had given them the benefit of the doubt in assessing their action to orchestrate the crucifixion as based on ignorance rather than malice. The apostles were, in fact, simply living in the reality of Christ’s resurrection, doing what Jesus had called them to do—to be witnesses of him and to live in the power of his life under the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Nothing of that has changed for Christ followers since. This is the underlying agenda of our lives—it plays out in a million different ways through the variety of our experiences and opportunities, but the heart of it remains the primary message of Jesus: the kingdom of God is available and accessible right now. In our text, an act of kindness generated the opportunity for that message to be heard—the display of Christ alive in us does the same.

Given this, there are a couple of ideas this passage highlights that have a bearing on us as followers of Jesus. The first is this: opposition to the purpose of Christ, whether in individuals or power structures, poses no threat to the truth of the resurrected Jesus or to the effect of his resurrection power. It can be disbelieved, but it cannot be undone meaning then, that his power is loose in the world through you who trust Jesus as you allow the manner of his life to define yours in daily life. As you draw near to Jesus, you find his approach to life becoming yours. His understanding of reality becomes yours, his grasp of God’s character and purpose and the immediate reality of God’s presence becomes yours. His continual experience of God at work in him and through him becomes your experience. His sensibilities become yours, and his sensitivity to the desperation of the human condition apart from God develops in you as well. Jesus had insight into the underlying causes of human dysfunction in terms of

self-image, relational dynamics, aspirations, and vulnerabilities and this awareness will form in you as well. Christ's assurance of God's love for him kept him grounded and secure even in the face of intense opposition—because of this assurance, he could respond to opposition or antagonism without rancor or spite, he had nothing to prove about himself, for his identity and security did not depend on others, but on God, allowing him to adopt a position of humility by which he simply told the truth. This assurance of God's love likewise keeps you grounded—you needn't be defensive or abrasive, instead being humble and gentle, grounded in truth, you can allow your life to speak for itself: you carry in you the evidence for the power of Christ's resurrection regardless of how others may perceive it.

Because of this, you are capable of resisting the games people play, the power plays, the antagonism, the subtle digs, for your goal in life is not to win, but to love, to truly desire the well-being of others even if others do not seem to want it for themselves. You cannot determine how others should respond to truth—you can only determine this for yourself. But this is the genius of life in Christ, by his grace, you have the ability to rise above the pettiness that so characterizes opposition—you need not return evil for evil, you are able to bless in the face of curses, for in Christ that is your natural response, your first impulse. And this isn't a "grit your teeth and bless even though you feel otherwise" dynamic—the deeper you sink into the grace of Christ, the more difficult it will be for you to respond in kind to opposition—you won't find the energy for it because you live in a different frame of reference, you have a higher goal in mind.

As a follower of Jesus, you bring the living Christ into every encounter of your day. Imagine the impact of that reality for the benefit of those around you. Imagine the joy of your assurance that the grace of Christ in some way, through your demeanor, your action, a timely word, the graciousness of time given, or even in a way unknown to you, will flow into another's life blessing them for the moment and perhaps for eternity. How might that understanding inform and enliven your prayer life? How might that hope seed your anticipation for the day?

The second idea this text highlights is that salvation doesn't come through a system, an institution, a set of rules, or causes. These are typically the means the flesh pursues to determine identity, belonging or meaning in life. Which is not to say that there aren't some benefits or lasting value in these—that's what makes them attractive and compelling. It is, however, to say that these are ultimately temporary and weak substitutes for determining meaning in life. They provide a momentary harbor for self-definition, but they offer little hope for substantive change. Relying on these for ultimate meaning appeals to the false self seeking to support what we believe about ourselves or what we want others to believe about us. In a sense it's image management where we allow the contours of the system or cause to define our sense of self. But they are illusory for while they occupy your time and tap your energy, they are primarily concerned about what you do rather than who you are. Sadly we regularly discover that reputable systems, institutions, rules, or causes are promoted by folks with disreputable character. Character is who you are; reputable causes do not of themselves affect disreputable character—they can mask it, but they cannot prevent it. Wholeness, or salvation concerns who you are. The good news is that this is available, and it comes by a person, It comes by close association with Jesus himself.

The kingdom of God is where we bring our flawed, vulnerable, weak, and scarred selves as they are to Jesus whose life regenerates ours bringing integrity, security, strength and healing—in a word, wholeness, that enables us to know the God Jesus revealed, to value what Jesus valued, and to live in the grace that characterized his life. Learning from him, we discover that the power of his resurrection flows in and through us, not just for our own benefit, but for the salvation of the world. Who we are in Christ will ultimately determine the lasting value of what we do. In Peter's day the power of Christ's resurrection flowed through him to bring healing and hope to one lame man and others who were held in the grip of something against which they had no power or recourse. Peter continued the work Jesus himself had done in that time. The question this raises for us is this: what are the contemporary equivalents of this in our time? What are the issues and circumstances against which persons in our day are powerless, in which they are vulnerable and deprived of the wholeness God desires

for them? How can Christ's resurrection power be directed to these persons? The way forward lies within each of us as we listen to the direction of Christ's spirit. Let's listen well and allow the power of Christ's resurrection flow into the world through us. AMEN