

March 30, 2008

“Easter Monday” Acts 4:1-37

FCF: Assumption that there’s little impact of Easter realities upon our days

PROPOSITION: (anchor) Because of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus,
(magnet) the lives of His followers should be charged with life.

SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:

You may have missed it but this past Monday (it being the day after Easter) was Dyngus Day. “I missed what?” you say. Dyngus Day – the Polish name for Easter Monday – a day of peculiar traditions. Early in the morning, boys awaken girls by pouring a bucket of water on their head and striking their legs with long, thin decorated switches. Over the years, this has developed into a courtship ritual of sorts and, in fact, is celebrated in various forms each year in such places as Buffalo, NY and South Bend, IN.

Well, delightful as all that sounds, there is a bit more to Easter Monday. Indeed, there’s a great deal to life after Easter, to the repercussions of the resurrection of Jesus.

SCRIPTURE READING: Acts 4:1-37

PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION

SERMON INTRODUCTION:

“What on earth happened to you?” Such a question begs an answer. When we observe a dramatic change in someone, it demands an explanation. Such as the time my mother came home, after leaving my dad in charge of my brother and me, only to be greeted with my bandaged and freshly stitched head. “What on earth happened to you?”

There’s something of that on a grander scale going on here in Acts. John Chrysostom, the great 4th century preacher, said that the change we see in the apostles by Acts 4 is as great a miracle as the healing of the lame beggar we see in Acts 3. Some of you may know that Acts is the second of Luke’s two volume work. Volume 2, of course, has some of the same characters as volume 1. But a dramatic change has taken place. So much so the first-time reader would hardly recognize them. Why? What has happened?

Remember that at the end of the Gospel accounts, the disciples were grieving. Jesus was dead and so were their hopes. But their discouragement was transformed into clarity and certainty. Again, why? They tell us – an empty tomb, a living Lord – His resurrection. That’s the only explanation for the change. Theirs was a resurrection faith. *Even critics who disbelieve the resurrection itself do not try to make the case that the disciples themselves did not believe it. For the record is plain they did. And so too did the early church.* Why would they have held to these things unless they were true? **Consider where it got them!** James beheaded. Philip scourged, thrown in prison, crucified. Matthew slain with a halberd. Andrew crucified. Mark dragged to pieces. Bartholomew beaten and crucified. Peter crucified. John banished to the Isle of Patmos.

It’s plain that the reality of the resurrection of Jesus changes the lives of those it touches. We could go so far as to say it charges the lives of His followers with life. Such is what we see in the events as they unfold in Acts 4. Let’s look at this together.

I. COURAGE

The first thing we see is a new courage in these men. This comes out in vv.1-22.

A) Where Once There Was Fear

Once there was fear and timidity, a time when they were cowards.

1. Reflected in what was done

Think back to the events surrounding Jesus’ arrest and trial. They forsook Him and fled. Think back to His carrying the cross and His collapse under its weight. It wasn’t one of

the twelve who helped Him carry it. It was Simon, a stranger from out of town. Twice in John's Gospel we read of their hiding, having locked the door "for fear of the Jews."

2. Reflected in what was said

Then, of course, there was Peter's denial. The spokesman for the group withering under the questions of a servant girl by a fire while His Lord endured a real interrogation.

B) Now There Is Boldness

Once there was fear. Now there was boldness. Acts 4 shines with it.

1. Reflected in what was done

Notice they stayed in Jerusalem. They didn't flee. Even more, they went back to the Temple, preaching in its courts, telling all who had ears of the resurrection of Jesus.

2. Reflected in what was said

Then there were the answers they gave to the Sanhedrin – the very same men behind the crucifixion of Jesus just a few weeks before. Listen (**READ Acts 4:8-12; 19-20**).

The effect of the resurrection was a new found Spirit-wrought courage.

Illustration:

J.R.R. Tolkien's The Fellowship of the Ring. Gandalf the wizard was gone, lost to the abyss in the Mines of Moria. The fellowship was enduring the grief of the loss of a friend and dismay in the loss of his counsel and strength. But all that changes in The Two Towers. In God's wonderful providence, it was the very chapter describing Gandalf's return I read to our kids on Easter Sunday. (**READ quote**) "We meet again. At the turn of the tide," he said. "The great storm is coming, but the tide has turned."

And their response? Courage, resolve, boldness in the face of great odds.

Application:

Such things are not entirely fictional. Paul writes in 2 Timothy (**READ 2 Timothy 1:6-7**). Yes, we are to be humble. But we need not be timid. One says what must be said with great care. But the other fears and often fails to say anything at all.

This is not a change of personality – introverts somehow becoming extroverts. This is a change of perspective, of seeing Christ as risen, of fear giving way to courage. Not speaking with crass rudeness but with simple clarity and conviction. Steeled with the knowledge of who has sent us. Why? How? The reality of Jesus' resurrection charges the lives of His followers with life – with fear giving way to boldness and courage.

II. DEPENDENCE

But we see more here as well – a new dependence. This comes out in vv.23-31.

A) Where Once There Was Doubt

Once there was such doubt. You see this even on the eve of Jesus' ascension (**READ Matthew 28:16-17**). Obviously these changes don't always come right away.

1. Self reliance

Self-reliance and dependence was what they were accustomed to – even with Jesus there.

2. Despair

Which then took them to self-despair when everything came crashing down around them.

B) Now There Is Assurance

Once there was doubt. But it began to then give way to an assured dependence.

1. Reflected in that they prayed

It was reflected in their prayers – in the fact they were praying. It comes out in how they addressed God, in who they knew Him to be – the God of creation, of revelation, of salvation. And they then confidently and dependently appealed to Him on that basis.

2. Reflected in how they prayed

Notice that they prayed. Notice what they prayed. Notice also how they prayed. Not curses being called down upon their enemies or even a ceasing of their struggles but grace, faithfulness, and perseverance in the face of their struggles (**READ Acts 4:29-30**).

They had no strength or wisdom in themselves. Only in God. So they prayed.

Illustration:

Now we understand something of this. Who we believe someone to be affects whether we'll go them in time of need. In an emergency, we call "911" and not the numbers for voting on "American Idol." If you have a question about your taxes, you sit down with an accountant. Who we believe someone to be affects whether we'll go them in time of need. It affects how we'll approach them as well. If you need a loan, you'll go to the bank on their terms, with all the right papers. If you don't understand a question, you raise your hand or approach the teacher respectfully and with a teachable spirit.

My point is we see something of this with the disciples after the resurrection as they went with dependence and confidence in the Lord as they prayed.

Application:

And we are bid to do the same with such dependence ourselves. Jesus taught on this very thing (**READ Luke 11:5-13**). The invitation is pressed upon us. "Come!"

It has to be this way. When you consider the immensity of the calling before us, it should drive us to our knees. Our callings as spouses, parents, children, siblings. The calling to be salt and light in this world, a city on a hill. To love our enemies. To the fruit of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. We don't have it in us to muster that up. But we can go to our knees and pray.

When we consider the immensity of our callings, it should drive us to our knees. And then when we consider the immensity of the resources made available to us, that should then keep us there. Such are the realities of the resurrection. The Lord has risen and the lives of His followers should be charged with life, going to Him continually.

III. COMMUNITY

But this life shows itself in more than just boldness and prayer. It comes out in love and a new community as well. We see this in vv.32-37. The Spirit manifests Himself in both deed and word, both service and witness, both love and testimony.

A) Where Once There Was But Love of Self

Again, such a change has taken place here. Once there was but a love of self.

1. Selfish ambition

Think back to what we read of these men in the Gospels – insecure about their own stations, jockeying for positions of influence, wanting preeminence. Selfish ambition.

2. Relational strife

Which led to relational strife. Fits of jealousy, outbreaks of quarrels and arguments.

B) Now There Is Love of Others

That's part of the candid record. But that love of self gave way to love of others.

1. Sense of what they shared together

(**READ Acts 4:32**) They had a clear sense of what they shared in common together – not just shared possessions but shared callings, mission, partnership, and life together.

2. Commitment to share with one another

And from that sense of what they shared together came a commitment to share with one another (**READ Acts 4:33**). And the practical outworking of this (**READ Acts 4:34-35**).

The reality of the resurrection brings a new found Spirit-wrought community.

Illustration:

Colin Powell tells this story in his book, My American Journey (READ quote):

On the speech circuit, I tell a story that goes to the heart of America's longing. ABC correspondent Sam Donaldson was interviewing a young African-American soldier in a tank platoon on the eve of the battle in Desert Storm. Donaldson asked, "How do you think the battle will go? Are you afraid?"

"We'll do okay. We're well trained. And I'm not afraid," the GI answered, gesturing toward his buddies around him. "I'm not afraid because I'm with my family."

The other soldiers shouted, "Tell him again. He didn't hear you." The soldier repeated, "This is my family, and we'll take care of each other."

That's a good illustration of the bond and commitment, the sharing of followers of Christ.

Application:

And that's what's held out for us. This is indeed possible. The question is asked all the time, *"Is there any solution to all the strife, the partisanship, the hostility, the isolation and oppression we see between individuals and groups in the world?"* Yes, there is. But only in the gospel, in the reality of Christ's death and resurrection.

And as followers of Christ, we have to say not only that this can be among us but this must be among us. It is what we're called to. We are beneficiaries of the greatest generosity. And so we should then be living as the most generous of all people. The world is looking to see this. And when they do, it has no small effect (READ Acts 4:33).

CONCLUSION:

Again let me stress this. Because of the reality of the resurrection of Jesus, the lives of His followers should be charged with life. It changes and transforms everything. Tony Campolo powerfully made this very point in a sermon years ago (READ quote):

It's Friday, but Sunday's a comin'. It was Friday, and my Jesus is dead on a tree. But that's Friday, and Sunday's a comin'. Friday, Mary's crying her eyes out, the disciples are running in every direction like sheep without a shepherd. But that's Friday, and Sunday's a comin'. Friday, some are looking at the world and saying, "As things have been, so they shall be. You can't change nothing in this world! You can't change nothing in this world!" But they didn't know that it was only Friday, and Sunday's a comin'. Friday, them forces that oppress the poor and keep people down, them forces that destroy people, the forces in control now, them forces that are gonna rule, they don't know it's only Friday, but Sunday's a comin'. Friday, people are saying, "Darkness is gonna rule the world, sadness is gonna be everywhere," but they don't know it's only Friday, but Sunday's a comin'. Even though this world is rotten, as it is right now, we know it's only Friday. But Sunday's a comin'.

Friday's past. Sunday's come. And now it's Monday – not that dark blue Monday where it's all you can do to get out of bed and face the week but a new light-infused Monday with both its real challenges and our real Champion. "The Lord has risen!"

Don't lose sight of that. Keep it before you. Ask the question of the apostles, "What on earth happened to you?" When we observe a dramatic change in someone, it demands an explanation. If you're just beginning to think through these things, look to the difference, the transformation, this made in their lives. It's documented and real. How else do you explain it? And, if you're a follower of Jesus but struggling with doubts, look to the difference it's made already in your own life and in the lives of those around you – whatever degree, whatever faint pulse of the courage, the dependence, the community. This is documented and real in the present. How else can you explain it? The resurrection is real. And it holds out for us the possibility of lives charged with life.

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