

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church
Des Moines, WA
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Acts 26:19-29

How Easter Peace Changes Us

- 1. It produces obedience**
- 2. It provides perseverance**

**Hymns: 145 – 752 – Distribution: 165, 150 –
Closing: 162**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

Acts 26:19-29 –

¹⁹ *“So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. ²⁰ First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. ²¹ That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. ²² But I have had God’s help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen— ²³ that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles.”*

²⁴ *At this point Festus interrupted Paul’s defense. “You are out of your mind, Paul!” he shouted. “Your great learning is driving you insane.”*

²⁵ *“I am not insane, most excellent Festus,” Paul replied. “What I am saying is true and reasonable. ²⁶ The king is familiar with these things, and I can speak freely to him. I am convinced that none of this has escaped his notice, because it was not done in a corner.*

²⁷ *King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.”*

²⁸ *Then Agrippa said to Paul, “Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?”*

²⁹ *Paul replied, “Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.”*

What do the following people have in common?

- Dr. Conrad Murray
- Lindsey Lohan
- Dred Scott
- Casey Anthony
- O.J. Simpson

All those individuals have had very public court cases. To that list, we might soon have to add George Zimmermann.

Some of the greatest drama can happen in court, and if the case evokes enough public interest, Americans tune in by the millions. Court cases tend to have so much drama that many movies and prime time shows have built their plots around them, from the older Perry Mason and Matlock, to LA Law, Shark and a host of others. For some reason, Americans even find small-time court shows with real cases fascinating. They’re intrigued by seeing the case progress and finally hearing the verdict.

Today, we see high drama in court. But the scene is more important than any movie or show that has ever been written. It is a true-to-life story that happens in Scripture. And it has much to do with the Easter story and with our faith.

Today, we will take a look into a Roman court in Palestine and see the defendant, Paul, state his case. As he does that, may we learn much about Easter peace. **We will see today “How Easter Peace Changes Us.”**

- 1. It produces obedience**
- 2. It provides endurance**

Since our reading is in the middle of a story, we really need to ask how things got to this point in Acts 26.

Background –

If you'd like to read the whole story of the preliminary events leading up to Paul's trial, you should read Acts 21-26 in your Bible reading this week. Many people remember Paul's trial in Rome, but this trial in Palestine may not be as familiar to you.

Paul had finished his Third Missionary Trip in Acts 21 and had returned to Palestine. He was bound and determined to go to Jerusalem. His companions tried and tried to persuade him not to go there because of the Jewish leaders who hated him and would plan violence against him, but Paul would not listen. And so he went. He was warmly received by the believers there. He went to the Temple in Jerusalem and was seized by some Jews who accused him of teaching against the laws of Moses. They beat him severely until the Roman guard stopped them.

Paul was given a chance to speak to the crowd to try to calm things down, but after attempting this unsuccessfully the Roman guard put him in protective custody. The next day he appeared before the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling council, which ended in an uproar. For his safety, the Roman guard took Paul to the Roman city of Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea. There he was put on trial by the Roman governor, Felix. Felix found no reason to condemn Paul, but kept him in prison for two years because he hoped to get a bribe to release him. After Felix was put down from his position, the next governor, named Festus, came into power. The court case intrigued Festus to the point where he asked King Herod Agrippa II from the north to listen to Paul's case with him. Agrippa was in charge of many of the details of Jewish religion in Palestine. He was a Jew and was well acquainted with the Old Testament. Agrippa was eager to hear Paul, and our text is a small

part of what Paul has to say to Festus and King Agrippa.

Paul recounts how he was converted on the road to Damascus by the light from heaven and the voice of Jesus and then says, *"So then, King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds. That is why the Jews seized me in the temple courts and tried to kill me. But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike. I am saying nothing beyond what the prophets and Moses said would happen—that the Christ would suffer and, as the first to rise from the dead, would proclaim light to his own people and to the Gentiles."*

1. Easter peace produces obedience

Paul says that he was not disobedient to the command and voice of God that he heard that day. How true that was! Paul needed to make some major changes to his life at that time and begin to obey God's voice. Paul desperately needed repentance. Paul (formerly known as "Saul") had been a zealous persecutor of the Christian faith. That is why he was headed for Damascus in the first place. He had letters from the high priest that authorized him to bring Christians from Damascus to Jerusalem and put them in prison. Later in his life, Paul would look back on his life as a persecutor with shame. **He needed to repent and stop his madness against the Christian Church.**

Paul spoke in our reading concerning what proper Christian repentance includes for all believers. He preached that people should *"turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds."*

What is true repentance? Repentance is more than feeling sorry for sin (contrition); it is action that follows in a Christian's life:

- A repentant husband who has been guilty of abusing his wife will stop abusing her.
- If you have rebelled against your parents and hurt them, you will apologize and be obedient in the future.
- An employee that has stolen from his employer will admit their sin and give back what was stolen.
- If a person has been misusing God's gifts of alcohol, sex, or even food, they will stop and find out exactly how God wants us to use these blessings.

Our sinful nature does not want to hear this. We want no part of obedience by nature. There is a streak inside all of us that detests obedience, often seen vividly in the teen years as a young adult wants to sprout their own wings!

Yet make no mistake about it. Easter peace and forgiveness finds joy in obeying our Lord's voice. John put it well in his first epistle: *"The man who says, 'I know (Jesus Christ),' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But if anyone obeys his word, God's love is truly made complete in him. This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did."* (2:4-6)

Please don't misunderstand. We don't earn God's forgiveness by doing good works and cleaning up our act. The truth is that we'll never be able to clean up our life and earn God's forgiveness. The Christian's life in this sinful world is like dirt in your home. Can you ever clean your house enough that it is completely dirt free? In all rooms and places? No way!

Our forgiveness comes from the blood of Jesus Christ, his Son, which purifies us from every sin. Our forgiveness was won on the cross and approved by the Father at the empty tomb. But a person who knows and believes this Easter peace has been changed. He now wants to be obedient to God and his commands as they live as his forgiven children!

Paul mentions another part of obedience in this text, which was a complete change from his past. He also talks about his marching orders from God and how he had been obedient to them. *"I was not disobedient to the vision from heaven. First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent..."*

God was calling Paul to be a missionary for the gospel in the Mediterranean world. Can you imagine have those marching orders? Can you imagine God coming to you and saying, "I'd like you to speak about me publicly in Federal Way, and then Seattle, then the state of Washington, then Canada, and then Japan. How would you feel about obeying those orders? That would be a tall order!

Yet Paul was obedient to this calling from God. He had gone on mission trips to Jews and Gentiles alike, even to the continent of Europe! And in fact, Paul counted it as a privilege that God would give him the honor of doing that work. He was honored that God would convert people by the message that he brought.

Would there be any results on his day in court? What did King Agrippa think of all this? Paul asked him directly! *" 'King Agrippa, do you believe the prophets? I know you do.' Then Agrippa said to Paul, 'Do you think that in such a short time you can persuade me to be a Christian?' "*

The original Greek did not have punctuation. Literally, this sentence says, **"In a little bit – you persuade me – to be Christian."** Translations

vary as to what Agrippa meant by this. We don't know from the Greek itself whether he said, "In a little while you think you can persuade me to be a Christian?" Or, "In such a short time you have persuaded me to be a Christian." Perhaps Paul's Spirit-filled witness had taken root in his heart as he spoke about his faith!

What about our obedience in speaking? There's an old saying that encourages people to "speak their piece." We could change the spelling of that a bit and be encouraged as Christians to "speak our p-e-a-c-e." Sharing your faith and speaking your peace does not need to be complicated. Sometimes I wonder if we make it seem so complicated to witness to others or speak about our faith. Evangelism courses and presentations can be good to go over, but it really is just about speaking your peace. As the Evergreen Lutheran High School Easter concert was called, "Christ Has Died; Christ Is Risen; Christ Will Come Again." **These are the tenets of our faith that we speak about!**

Pointing out sin to lead another to repentance as you speak about your faith doesn't need to be complicated, either. **Just speak your peace!**

2. Easter peace provides perseverance

Our reading has one other lesson for us this morning. We have learned all about the obedience that Easter peace lead us to. We also see in our text how this peace will also provide us with endurance when we need it.

Think for a moment about the opposition that Paul faced in this phase of his life. In Acts 21, he faced the opposition of a brutal, ruthless mob that caused a riot and beat him up. He was put on trial by his own people just as Christ had been.

He endured the unjust treatment of the first Roman governor; he faced, Felix. Felix gave him hope that he would be released, but kept him in prison in the hopes of getting a bribe from him or the Church.

Then there was the comment by the current Roman governor, Festus. We read, "*At this point Festus interrupted Paul's defense. 'You are out of your mind, Paul!' he shouted. 'Your great learning is driving you insane.' 'I am not insane, most excellent Festus,' Paul replied. 'What I am saying is true and reasonable.'*" In the middle of his defense, Paul was interrupted by the judge, who calls him insane! I don't recall seeing that in any court cases lately. Usually the judge tells those in court to ignore outbursts like that. But Paul responds calmly and evenly to that opposition.

The only way that Paul could have made it through all of that was with God's help. He said, "*But I have had God's help to this very day, and so I stand here and testify to small and great alike.*" That was his strength and comfort in opposition. **His Easter peace would give him strength to persevere.**

He even met his opposition with a prayer on his lips: "*Short time or long—I pray God that not only you but all who are listening to me today may become what I am, except for these chains.*"

What opposition do you risk for the faith? After seeing what Paul had to face, it may not seem like much! As a pastor, what do I risk for preaching the truth of God's Word?

- Might someone get up and leave during the sermon?
- Might an outburst happen in church?
- Might a hearer who was upset about the message from Scripture send an e-mail on Monday?

A big deal?

What might you face for speaking your Easter peace?

- Someone might tell you they think you're wrong
- You might get a hard question
- Someone may challenge your character
- You might have a neighbor who has hard feelings about what you said
- You might cause hurt feelings in the family for speaking the truth
- You may lose a friend
- And the world might (will?) call you nuts ("You believe in a resurrection of the dead? And that God created the world? And in an ark full of animals?")

Big deal? Not such a big deal when we see the help and strength that Paul had behind us as well. No big deal when we consider how saints, martyrs, and missionaries before us endured hardship, persecution, and opposition for the Easter peace that they knew. And when we see how in Agrippa's words there might even have been a glimmer of hope for faith, we are encouraged all the more as we see that the Holy Spirit brings power to the Word. You might even risk... success!

High drama in court! It is not a novel concept in our times. **Today we learn from a court setting long, long ago about how Easter peace changes us:**

- 1. It produces obedience**
- 2. It provides perseverance**

May our Easter peace in the risen Christ and our salvation live in our hearts always! Amen.