

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
April 27, 2014**

**Acts 2:14, 22-32**

**Called and Enabled**

- 1. You will be my witnesses**
- 2. Peter was given opportunity**
- 3. When you have opportunity**

**Hymns: 145 - 165 - 144  
Closing: 168**

All Scripture quotations from NIV 1984

***14 Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say.. . . .***

***22 "Men of Israel, listen to this: Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know. 23 This man was handed over to you by God's set purpose and foreknowledge; and you, with the help of wicked men, put him to death by nailing him to the cross. 24 But God raised him from the dead, freeing him from the agony of death, because it was impossible for death to keep its hold on him. 25 David said about him: " 'I saw the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken.***

***26 Therefore my heart is glad and my tongue rejoices; my body also will live in hope, 27 because you will not abandon me to the grave, nor will you let your Holy One see decay. 28 You have made known to me the paths of life; you will fill me with joy in your presence.' 29 "Brothers, I can tell you confidently that the patriarch David died and was buried, and his tomb is here to this day. 30 But he was a prophet and knew that God had***

***promised him on oath that he would place one of his descendants on his throne. 31 Seeing what was ahead, he spoke of the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to the grave, nor did his body see decay. 32 God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact.***

Upon first hearing, it probably sounded like a rather harmless statement. "You will be my witnesses," was the invitation that Jesus had given to the men who had been following him around. At that point, it probably didn't seem all that daunting. "You want us to tell people about the miracles, the healings, the great preaching that we've heard? Sure, you bet," they may have shrugged, "We can do that. No big deal, in fact we'd be glad to tell people about the great things we've been seeing."

However, when the directive was given again after they had seen the arrest, the trial, the suffering and death, all of the events of Holy Week; I'm sure that the call to witness struck a different chord. In our Gospel, John recounted that as Jesus appeared to those same men on Easter Sunday evening, they were now locked inside a house gripped by fear. And as Jesus repeated the commission, "As the Father has sent me, so now I am sending you," there may have been some hesitation where there once was not. Certainly now, after seeing all that Jesus went through in his God-given mission, there was a bit more weight to it, to be sent just as Jesus sent, that would now cause some eyebrows to rise. Everything had changed. Yet, it was still just a prospective directive, still just words that they could nod in agreement with and promise to do. After all, it is easy enough to say you can do something.

But now, as we find Peter and those disciples in Acts 2, just 50 days later, my oh my, had things changed. Now, this was real. Now, Peter and his friends were standing in front of thousands of their fellow Jews. They were, for the most part, people who had also been witnesses to Jesus' life. They

were, for the most part, people who also had been witnesses, or who, at the very least, had heard of Jesus' death. But they were not for the most part, people who had been witnesses to the resurrected Jesus. And they certainly didn't know what it all meant.

So, here was the opportunity that Jesus was talking about; to tell these people – all these people; all these Jewish people who would only be in this place together one time - that Jesus' death wasn't just any death; to tell them it was part of a plan; to tell them that he wasn't dead anymore. Suddenly, that invitation to "be my witness" wasn't harmless. Suddenly, that commissioning to go out wasn't just a directive. It was real, and it was here, probably quicker than Peter thought it would be, and it was in front of all these Jews in Jerusalem, that he was to be a witness for Jesus. Can you imagine being in Peter's place? The pit in the stomach? The fear of what to say? The pressure not to mess up?

Of course, we can. Because you and I, just like Peter and his friends, have been called by Jesus to be his witnesses. He has sent us out into our own respective worlds with the charge to tell others about what we have seen. When we are called to faith, we are also called to speak and share. But perhaps in looking at all the Scriptures, and celebrating all that God has done for us, it becomes easy to brush over what Jesus has asked us to do for him. "So, Jesus, you are going to take care of my sin; suffer and die in my place; rise from the dead; ascend into heaven; rule all things for my good while preparing an eternal place for me; give me the Holy Spirit to create and strengthen my faith; and you are just asking, but not requiring that I tell others about all of that? Yeah, sure, I can do that; no problem. I can be a witness. I can speak about you." It's easy enough to say we can do something.

But then what happens? This whole witnessing thing becomes real when Jesus puts the opportunity in our life. And very few of those opportunities would be described as "easy." And even fewer we would label

stress-free. Being a witness for Jesus often requires that we put ourselves out of our comfort zone. It often requires that we put ourselves, and even our relationships, at risk. Those are the realities of being sent out by Jesus.

And when we are faced with reality? That willingness that we spoke about having can quickly disappear. More often than not, and I have to say I am very guilty of this, we back away when the situation becomes real. We reason that the time isn't quite right. We wager that the odds of success aren't in our favor. We convince ourselves that the risks are too high. And besides, if we were to speak, would the message actually be received? Telling someone that they are a sinner would be offensive. Telling them that they can't do anything on their own and need help would be rejected. Telling them that the Bible is the answer would be shot down as old and out of touch.

The truth is that when it comes to our job as witnesses, we often do quite well at the "seeing" part, but we struggle with the "talking about it" part.

So, on this Sunday after Easter, as the joy of Christ's victory is still right there in front of us and ready to be shared, let us take our cue to be witnesses from Peter, this disciple who once locked himself behind closed doors in fear.

When Peter was given opportunity by Jesus, though it wasn't easy and it wasn't comfortable, listen again to how he responded: ***"Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say."*** (Acts 2:14)

What is described for us there in Acts is not what we would expect from a man who not that many days before had vehemently denied knowing Jesus, and who then had hid away in fear. Those were the actions and words of a confident man. Peter stood up, raised his voice, and he demanded an audience, "Listen to me!" Peter knew that if Jesus had called him to speak, if Jesus had given him an audience to speak to, Jesus

would also enable Peter to speak. Jesus would give him the words, Jesus would produce results.

That absolute confidence in Jesus was new. It came from what Peter had seen. Jesus arrested and beaten had caused Peter to deny. Jesus crucified and buried had caused Peter to hide and fear. But Jesus resurrected - just as he said he would be - gave Peter assurance that every other word of promise that Jesus had given to him and the rest of the disciples was trustworthy and true. And Jesus had promised to be with Peter as he sent him out to do the difficult job of witnessing. The resurrected Lord gave Peter confidence. The resurrected Lord made Peter a believer. He knew, he had been told exactly what Jesus' life, death, and resurrection meant for him; he knew what it meant for the world.

So Peter stood up, and he gave a strong proclamation. He didn't fear the results; he didn't weigh the pros/cons; he didn't doll up the message. He told these people very directly that they put Jesus to death, and that was the wrong decision. It was the wrong decision because this man actually was the Son of God like he had claimed. And the proof was in the resurrection. God had raised the crucified Jesus from the dead; he had freed him from death; he had kept him from decay. Just as he had God had promised he would do for his Holy One. It was clear that these people were on the wrong side of God, and Peter told them as much. He delivered the offensive message of the Law. He told them what they needed to hear.

And something amazing happened. They didn't tell him to stop. They didn't push him away. They didn't rebuke what he said. Instead, later in Acts 2, we are told that they were cut to the heart, and asked, "What shall we do?" Then Peter had the privilege of telling them the good news. But first, Peter had to stand up and speak an uncomfortable message in an uncomfortable place, and as he did, Jesus kept his promise: Jesus called Peter to witness, and Jesus enabled Peter to witness.

And to every witness, there is that same assurance: If Jesus calls, Jesus will enable. And you have been called as a witness. You have just once again been witness to all that Jesus did while on this earth. You've seen his perfect life and heard the message he proclaimed. You know the details of the cross. You were here to see the empty tomb. But more importantly, you know what it means for you, for every person out in the world. Through Jesus' death, God has given forgiveness of sins. Through Jesus' resurrection, God has given the assurance of life eternal.

So, having seen and believed, there is only one thing to do: Stand up with confidence, and speak boldly. Like Peter, proclaim that strong message that people need to hear: the Law and the Gospel; the bad news and the good news; the problem and the solution.

Do it with this assurance: Jesus has called you to be a witness, be confident that he will also enable you to be a witness. Amen.