

**Holy Trinity Lutheran Church  
Des Moines, WA  
May 1, 2011**

**Acts 10:39-43**

**Privileged!**

- 1. Peter speaks about his life**
- 2. How do we describe our lives in this Easter season?**

**Hymns: 144– 165 – 156 – 162**

Acts 10:39-43 –

***“We are witnesses of everything he did in the country of the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the third day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen—by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead. All the prophets testify about him that everyone who believes in him receives forgiveness of sins through his name.”***

Okay, be honest. Who watched it? After months of anticipation, the royal wedding took place this past Friday. Prince William and Kate Middleton tied the knot at Westminster Abby with the biggest and best of nobility and celebrity in attendance. It was said that this was one of the biggest security details in the history of the world. On Friday, I heard an estimate that 2 billion people worldwide tuned in to watch. That number seems a little high, but it just shows the magnitude of the event that such a number would even be thrown out there. Though I happened to be up for some reason at 2:00 am on that Friday morning, I did not tune in, and even though I didn't see it, I would have to imagine that it was quite the event. It tends to be that way when you are part of the most famous royal family in the world. When you see such extravagance and worldwide attention for a wedding, it has to get you thinking: what must life be like as a prince of England? If you had to choose just one, what word would you use to describe that life? The word that came to me was “privileged.” Is there anything that isn't available to this young royalty? It must be quite the life, a life of privilege which very few people ever know.

And you know, as I read the Apostle Peter's words in the first lesson from the book of Acts, I found myself thinking about that same word as I thought about Peter's life. ***“We were witnesses of everything he did in the country of***

***the Jews and in Jerusalem. They killed him by hanging him on a tree, but God raised him from the dead on the 3<sup>rd</sup> day and caused him to be seen. He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen – by us who ate and drank with him after he rose from the dead.”*** His was really a life of privilege, wasn't it? Just think about where he came from. At one point in his life, catching a huge haul of fish would have been the highlight of his day. He was a simple Galilean fisherman, and there was no pride in that title. But one day, as he was minding his nets, he received a call. A man named Jesus came to him with a request, “Follow me,” he simply said. And as Peter left his father with his boat, there is no way he could've imagined where he would be led.

For three years he would have the privilege of witnessing Jesus' earthly ministry. He would see every miracle of healing. He would hear every memorable word of teaching and preaching. He would be awed as he distributed bread and fish to 5,000 people. He would walk on water. All amazing events, but just the tip of the iceberg. Peter was one of three men to observe the transfiguration personally. He had Jesus wash his feet. He was there when Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper. Of course, he also witnessed more troubling scenes. He saw the betrayal in the Garden, he saw Jesus on trial, and he had to look at Jesus as he hung on the tree. And for a while, Peter probably thought that was the last scene of Jesus' life that he was going to witness. But we know that it was not. On the evening of the first Easter Day, Peter would be privileged to witness the resurrected Lord in the flesh. In a small house as he was huddled with his fearful fellow disciples, Jesus would appear and prove unequivocally that he was alive. He would eat and drink with his disciples; he would show them his wounds. What a wild ride and Peter's journey from that lake in Galilee to that house in Jerusalem could be described in a few words, “Peter was privileged to witness.”

Peter understood that this privilege was not based upon anything that he had done. As he talked about being a witness, he understood that it was God alone who chose to give him this special privilege. Jesus was seen and heard by many people during his time on this earth. But not all who saw him got to understand who he truly was. God chose Peter and his fellow disciples by his grace. He worked faith in their hearts so that they could believe and know who Jesus truly was.

Why would God give such a privilege to these few men? The privilege of witnessing such amazing things came with another privilege. After seeing all of the salvation work personally, these witnesses were to speak. As Jesus appeared to them after his resurrection, he told them that they would be his witnesses in the world. They were expected to speak this message to those who had not been given the privilege of witnessing it all. Peter and the apostles would be privileged to preach. They would be God's chosen instruments to bring salvation to the ends of the earth. And when it came to this part of the privilege, that is where Peter didn't fully understand the entire scope of what he had been given.

It is somewhat amazing as Peter and the apostles went out to preach, they weren't clear on who they should share the message with. First of all, they had seen and heard as Jesus reached out to Romans and Samaritans and people

who were not from Israel. Secondly, they had heard as Jesus told them to go and make disciples of all nations. Those directives seem pretty clear. And yet, as we look at the Acts of the Apostles and the spread of the early Christian church, we hear that the Apostles had not taken Jesus' words to heart. Even eight to nine years after Jesus left this earth, the apostles were preaching only to the Jews.

To a certain extent, Peter and the other apostles had abused their privilege. They had decided that their responsibility to preach only extended to their fellow Jews. They were under the impression that salvation was only for their fellow blood descendants of Abraham. And because of that, Peter needed to be reminded that Jesus' work was for all, and his preaching was also to be for all. In the verses prior to what we read in chapter 10 of Acts, Peter was shown through a vision from heaven that the message of salvation was for people of all nations. This news from God flipped Peter's world upside down. It made him appreciate even more the privilege he had been given – to witness and to preach. He appreciated his privilege to witness, knowing that there were so many who had not been able to see all that God had done. He appreciated his privilege to preach, knowing that he would bring a life-changing message to all who heard what he had to say.

And it wasn't just those first apostles who were privileged. In this Easter season, can we describe ourselves as anything but privileged?

We might not live the life of privilege that the Prince of England has lived, we might even say that there is nothing privileged about our lives of trouble here – with constant worries about jobs and financial situations, health problems and family troubles. But take stock of what you have for just a few moments this morning. So often, we become enamored with all the difficulties that we have in life and we forget what we have.

Through the gift of faith and the Word of God, you have been privileged to witness all those same events that Jesus' disciples witnessed. In the past four months from Christmas to Easter, you have had the privilege of witnessing part of the salvation story every Sunday. That journey began on Christmas, as you had the privilege of standing by the manger as God came to this earth as true man. Through the weeks of Epiphany, you witnessed as Jesus made himself known as the Son of God. In Lent, you got to look on as Jesus traversed perfectly through Satan's minefield, humbling himself in order to accomplish his goal. During Holy Week, you sat in the Upper Room as Jesus instituted the Lord's Supper, you stood in Pilate's court as Christ was put on trial, you travelled to Calvary as he paid the price for all of our sins. On Easter Sunday, you entered the empty tomb and you saw the resurrected Lord. What a privilege you have been given to be able to witness it all. What a gift that the Holy Spirit entered your heart so that you know the paths of life. We are truly privileged to witness!

And to be witnesses means that we have also been given the privilege to preach. But in all honesty, do we look at it that way – as a privilege? Do we see the urgency; or are we sometimes content to sit on what we have? Are you happy enough in the fact that you personally know what Jesus has done for you, and while it would be nice if everyone else did, you won't lose any sleep if they don't?

Are we abusing the privilege that God has given us as witnesses?

A witness is to speak about what he has seen. Every day, we are given opportunities to tell people about life-changing events. We get to speak about the life and times of the Messiah, because that is what we have been privileged to see. We get to share the message of salvation with people who do not know what it is all about. The Holy Spirit has chosen us to be his heralds of victory. What a privilege! How can that knowledge not send us running out into the streets, to our friends and relatives and neighbors, to all those who have not seen?

I pray that God would enable us to see how truly privileged we are in these weeks after Easter. We are privileged to have witnessed the risen Lord! We are privileged to preach about him in the world!

As we close hear today, take Peter's words to heart as you reflect on your life of privilege, "He was not seen by all the people, but by witnesses whom God had already chosen. He commanded us to preach to the people and to testify that he is the one whom God appointed as judge of the living and the dead."