

Easter Sunday is big. If Jesus' resurrection is the most significant event in all of human history; AND IT IS !!! it's no wonder that Christians around the world pull out every stop to celebrate, including Zion, Clyman. The Scripture readings are powerful. The hymns are upbeat, filled with joy and hope. You sing with added zest and volume. Trumpet descants soar. The choir gives it all they've got. Beautiful, fragrant flowers adorn the sanctuary. New artwork was a bonus and the joyful sound of free ringing bells to conclude our worship produced a mighty wave of emotion. Christ is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia! Yes, the resurrection of Jesus is powerful, awesome news. In addition we enjoyed a delicious breakfast together and engaged in cheerful conversation. Doesn't the week after Easter have to come down several notches at every level? What kind of encore can there be to our Lord's resurrection? What's next? What comes next is presented in the book of Acts. Each year the Sundays from Easter until Pentecost include a reading from Acts. Acts begins by describing what happened immediately after Easter. Jesus' ascension into heaven took place forty days later followed soon by the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Luke the writer of Acts notes that with the Holy Spirit's coming, "everyone kept feeling a sense of awe".

God's Word for today from Acts is about the Easter encore. What happened? What was next? The excitement, the awe, the good feelings that the early Christians were all feeling were not an end in themselves. It's good to feel good especially about something as important as our God being a living God and our hope that our bodies will be raised from the grave at the last day. Praise God! But that message is not one that can rest quietly or be contained. It has to go forth. It simply must be proclaimed! Pentecost was no sooner over than Luke takes up how the Good News about Jesus began to be proclaimed and made progress immediately. He begins in ch. 3 by telling how Peter and John went up to the temple to pray one afternoon. They encountered a man, lame since birth, begging alms. Peter said, "I do not possess silver and gold but what I have I give to you, 'In the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene – walk.'" He got up immediately, walking and leaping and praising God in the temple. The word about Jesus was not contained, but proclaimed... and with awesome results. Peter used the stir that healing caused as a first occasion to proclaim Jesus, whom they had crucified, "but whom God raised from the dead, a fact to which we are witnesses." Peter called the many people who had witnessed this healing to repent of their sins and put their trust in Jesus. Peter preached a powerful sermon to his Jewish audience. "It is you who are the sons of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with your fathers, saying to Abraham, 'and in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed. For you first, God raised up His Servant and sent Him to bless you by turning every one of you from your wicked ways.'" Peter hadn't finished preaching when he was suddenly arrested (roughly, they laid hands on them) and thrown in jail.

Easter encore? The Word about Jesus the living God, powerful and compassionate, was accompanied by a miracle and further proclamation of God's Word. Peter told who Jesus is and what He had done. Many people listened. Then came the pushback. Immediately, the Good News about Jesus that called for repentance and faith was opposed.

When Peter and John were brought before the authorities the next day for interrogation, Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit was not distressed or at a loss for words. When challenged to tell by what name or authority he has done this healing He essentially puts the pedal to the metal, "Rulers and elders of the people, if we are on trial today for a benefit done to a sick man, as to how this man was made well, let it be known to all of you, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, whom God raised from the dead- by this NAME this man stand here before you in good health. He is the stone which was rejected by you but has become the very corner stone." Instead of being silenced and stopped as the authorities intended the tables are turned. The leaders don't have a case. They are flabbergasted by the confidence and eloquence of an uneducated man like Peter. They recognize that he has been with Jesus. They have nothing to say in reply to Peter's powerful witness. All they can do is command them to stop preaching about Jesus.

The Easter encore? The message about Jesus' resurrection goes forward. It is proclaimed and the kingdom of God begins to grow. The infant church moves ahead. Resisted, bullied, threatened? Yes! Stymied, defeated, destroyed? Hardly! They return to their companions and recounted what had happened. Then they pray that God would give them courage to move forward. "And now Lord, take note of their threats, and grant that Thy bond-servants may speak Thy word with all confidence while Thou dost extend Thy hand to heal, and signs and wonders take place through the name of Thy holy servant Jesus. And when they had prayed, the place where they had gathered was shaken and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit, and began to speak the Word of God with boldness." Easter encore? They talked about Jesus and the resurrection and people responded in faith. Sure there was resistance. Always has been, still is, always will be. But God the Holy Spirit was moving the new church to move forward and moving forward means talking about Jesus.

Fast forward just a bit. Many miracles were taking place through the apostles. The preaching of the Word was accompanied by signs and wonders; so much so that people laid the sick in the streets so that even the shadow of the apostles might fall on them. Luke says all who were sick or afflicted with unclean spirits were healed. The power of so many healings bore testimony to the power of God's Word; to the power of Jesus Himself. As more and more people came to believe in Jesus, (Luke says multitudes) the apostles were arrested and jailed again. But this time an angel came at night and turned them loose.

As He released them the 'angel of the Lord', frequently a designation for Jesus Himself, said, "Go your way, stand and speak to the people in the temple the whole message of this Life." Again the message is the same; move forward...keep proclaiming the message of salvation in Jesus...don't be afraid... keep talking about Him. Again there is resistance, but not without an element of humor. When the authorities once more demand that they be brought before them they send officers to the prison and get them. Officers and sentries, doors and locks, walls and gates; their maximum security lock down was a joke. They were heavily guarding empty space. And where were the apostles? "But someone came and reported to them, 'Behold the men whom you put in the prison are standing in the temple and teaching the people.'" They were arrested yet again and sternly warned again to stop preaching about Jesus. Peter's famous reply was, "We must obey God rather than men." Once again there is resistance but there is no stopping the Gospel winning more people to faith in Jesus.

Friends in Christ, isn't God calling us through His Word to move forward? Moving forward now is the same as moving forward in the days following Pentecost. Moving forward means talking about Jesus to those whom God puts in your path. Like that man who was begging alms, God places people who are calling for your attention. They might think they need one thing (money) but they really need something else. They need Jesus. The Easter encore is not more flowers, more music, more art, more breakfast, more anything inside the walls of this church. The Easter encore is to talk about the hope that you have in Jesus with those who don't know Him very well or not at all. God is calling you and me today to move forward in our witness. Don't be timid. Yes, there will be opposition. Yes, it will cause you some grief. But the kingdom of God advances one person at a time as people come to know and believe in Jesus. You are His witness. Who will you invite to come to church with you next week? Easter has no bigger encore than you reaching out with the Good News of Jesus. Amen