

SERMON FOR APRIL 28, 2019

TEXT: ACTS 5: 12-20

THEME: SPEAKING THE WORDS OF LIFE

<sup>12</sup> Now many signs and wonders were regularly done among the people by the hands of the apostles. And they were all together in Solomon's Portico. <sup>13</sup> None of the rest dared join them, but the people held them in high esteem. <sup>14</sup> And more than ever believers were added to the Lord, multitudes of both men and women,<sup>15</sup> so that they even carried out the sick into the streets and laid them on cots and mats, that as Peter came by at least his shadow might fall on some of them. <sup>16</sup> The people also gathered from the towns around Jerusalem, bringing the sick and those afflicted with unclean spirits, and they were all healed. <sup>17</sup> But the high priest rose up, and all who were with him (that is, the party of the Sadducees), and filled with jealousy <sup>18</sup> they arrested the apostles and put them in the public prison. <sup>19</sup> But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the prison doors and brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup> "Go and stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this Life."

In the name of Jesus:

Last Sunday tragedy struck our brothers and sisters in the resurrection faith in the country of Sri Lanka. Terrorists struck at Christian believers, bombing churches and luxury hotels, killing at least 290 people. Soon after these bombings, the head of the Coptic Orthodox Church in the United Kingdom called on people of all faiths to make a joint stand against what he calls "Anti-Christianism." The Archbishop of the Church, Archbishop Angaelos, made this appeal saying: "it was time to act" and that "Anti Christianity needed to be

recognized as a real phenomenon alongside anti-Semitism and Islamaphobia. He went on to say that it is real, and it is as epidemic as anti-Semitism and Islamaphobia, and it needs to be dealt with as such.

The Christian Church has always dealt with hatred and conflict, and such is the case in our first reading for today. There has always been tension between the followers of Jesus and those who don't believe in Jesus, and in our text, we see the tension, and it was real, between the ruling authorities of the day and those who followed Jesus.

During Jesus' earthly ministry, the conflict was between the Pharisees and Jesus. But after Jesus' resurrection, the Sadducees were the main perpetrators of the conflict between Jesus' followers and these religious leaders.

The Pharisees and the Sadducees both had problems with Jesus and His teaching, but for the Sadducees, their conflict with Jesus' followers all hinged on their belief in, or I should say, their lack of belief in the resurrection. The old saying that we learning in Sunday school gives us the true differences between the Pharisees and the Sadducees. The difference between the Pharisees and the Sadducees is that the Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection. And that is why they were

sad, you see, because the Sadducees didn't believe in a resurrection. Get it?

And so this became the source of tension and conflict in our text. The disciples of Jesus went about living and proclaiming that Jesus had in fact rose from the grave, just as He said He would. The Apostles and other followers of Jesus were eyewitnesses of the Resurrected One, and now they are running around and telling others about Jesus. And this didn't sit well with the Sadducees. So in an attempt to silence them, the Sadducees had the Apostles arrested and thrown in jail, demanding that they cease and desist in telling others about Jesus and the resurrection.

But a problem arose, in that, even though the Apostles were arrested and thrown into prison, the other believers could not and would not keep silent. Just note what Luke records in verse 13: "none of the rest joined them, but the people held them in high esteem." That is to say, the life and lifestyle of those who believed in Jesus was so different, so inviting, so loving, and so powerful and no one wanted to join the Sadducees in their attempt to silence the Christians at that time. The leaders of the Christian Church, and later we shall see that the followers of Jesus were even willing to suffer persecution and death because of their faith. Just witness what happened to Stephen in Acts

chapter 8; he was stoned to death because of his faith. All on account of his faith in Jesus, the One who died on the cross and rose from the grave. Their faith and the way they lived their lives became such an offense to others that the believers were willing to be ostracized, persecuted, and even die for Jesus.

But why? What was so offensive about their lifestyle? The believers in Jesus were known by this, from Acts chapter 2: “<sup>42</sup> And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. <sup>43</sup> And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. <sup>44</sup> And all who believed were together and had all things in common. <sup>45</sup> And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need.”

So what did these believers do? How did they live their lives after Easter? To put it another way, they became students of the Word of God, they devoted themselves to going to church, to worship, to Bible Study, they continually went to the Lord's Supper, and they prayed to the Lord. As a result, many more people came to faith in Jesus, the Christians showed their love for Jesus first and foremost, and then

expressed their love for Jesus in love for their fellowman, helping others and sharing what they had with others. And the Church grew.

And so, what about us? Is it to be any different? To look at it, one would think that we live on two entirely different planets, for many today make it a habit to neglect coming to church for worship, don't go to Bible study, and rather than share what they have make excuses as to why they don't. Does our live look any different than those who don't believe in Jesus?

Jesus said that the greatest commandment is to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, soul, mind and strength. And the second is like it; love your neighbor as yourself. But here is the thing about loving God and your neighbor; God doesn't force Himself upon anyone. Instead, He has shown His love for you and me in that He sent His only son, Jesus, to live for us, love us to the point of dying on the cross, and then raised His Son from the grave, so that by believing in Jesus we might have life by His name. And that life in the name of Jesus means that, by faith in Jesus who rose from the grave, we as His followers today die to sin and selfishness and rise to newness of life.

God has given you new life in Baptism. You have been saved to give glory to God. And God receives glory honor and praise when we as His children live lives loving others. It is as John the Apostle writes: “<sup>7</sup> Beloved let us love one another, for love is from God, and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Anyone who does not love does not know God, because God is love. <sup>11</sup> Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. <sup>19</sup> We love because he first loved us. <sup>20</sup> If anyone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And this commandment we have from him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

In the Asian country of Nepal, there is a law that allows only one religion, Hinduism. All other religions, including Christianity, are illegal. But what is noteworthy is this: if you followed another religion, including Christianity, you were placed in jail for one year. If you were caught witnessing to others about your faith, you got three years in jail. And if you witnessed to someone and they were converted to believe in your religion that got you five years in jail. But here is the kicker, the Christian Church in Nepal is alive and well and growing, but do you know that the majority of the Christians in Nepal are in jail? Why?

Because they dared to live and keep living for Jesus! That is what the Resurrection Life looks like and what the Christian life is all about, speaking the Words of Life to others, that they might believe in and live for Jesus.

So, if you lived in Nepal, would you be in jail? If not, why not? May God the Holy Spirit so empower and bless you that you might live your life to the glory of God, living and telling others the Christ is risen, He is risen indeed!

Amen