



The Reverend Anthony Estes
The Fourth Sunday of Easter
April 25, 2021

Readings: Acts 4:5-12; 1 John 3:16-24
Psalm 23
Gospel: John 10:11-18

After Peter and John encountered a lame man in front of the temple gate called “Beautiful,” so many people were astounded by what they had seen, that they begin to crowd around them.

And Peter begins to speak with them.

He uses the opportunity to tell them the truth...the truth about Jesus:

That the God of *all* of their fathers — the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, the God of Jacob — had glorified a servant named “Jesus” who was a prophet and a teacher and a healer and the Messiah.

And that, due to their own ignorance, they rejected that truth.

But that even that rejection was a contingency in the purpose and plan of God, so that the message to repent, to return to the Lord, could be received...even *more* strongly.

And I argue that it was *this* message (not *just* the simple fact of this man being healed) that gets Peter and John brought to a courtroom of sorts.

And there they are expected to give testimony to the people and the priests and the captain of the temple and the Sadducees and the elders and the scribes...and all of those who are of the high priestly family.

They are asked to give an account, to give *witness* to *whose power* and by *what name* they were able to heal that man.

And Peter is *filled* with the Holy Ghost and tells them the truth:

That Jesus was alive...that the stone that the builders had *rejected* (perhaps because they thought they knew better) had been glorified and become the *chief of the corner*.

You see, something happened to Peter and the rest of the disciples when they *saw* Jesus in the flesh, when they were *filled* with the Spirit, when Peter's tongue was *loosened*...so that same tongue that had denied him would become the tongue that would glorify him.

That when Peter *saw* the hands and the sides of Jesus...when he became even more convinced of the resurrection...when he *saw* that God has glorified him, he knew that everything Jesus had *said* and everything that Jesus had *taught* about God had been confirmed:

That God was on the side of *all*.

And he was willing to share that. *Even if* it meant severe punishment.

The lectionary does not include the verses — but their [the council's] *response* to this message...is doubt...and disbelief...and an attempt to discredit them, because they were *uneducated* men.

This sermon is not about Derek Chauvin or George Floyd.

If anything, it's about Darnella Fraser, that young teenage girl who captured the video that was widely seen throughout the world, a girl who risked her *own* safety trying to share the truth...not only about what happened to George Floyd, but, I'm arguing, about what happens to all of us when *we* are confronted with the truth but don't want to *accept* it, don't want to *believe* it...when our response is...dismissal.

You see, sisters and brothers, the truth is...racism affects *all* of us.

And it reduces us to *victims* or *victimizers*.

And all of us are either *complicit* or *explicitly cooperating* with systems,
real or ideological,
that perpetuate moral or even *physical* violence
against those who are...different.

The main problem with announcing that truth in your hearing is that there is something about the human condition...that doesn't want to *believe* that...about *ourselves*, either corporately or individually.

You see, we really want to *believe* that we have...*evolved*...that we've taken enough sensitivity training, that we've read enough books...that we have now become *educated!*

We've convinced ourselves perhaps that we might be sheep, but we don't necessarily need a shepherd...to tell us where to go or what to eat or where to drink.

That perhaps we "sheepy" people have convinced ourselves that the predators out there aren't real...or aren't there. And so why would we need a shepherd to tell us anything?

The man at the gate called “Beautiful,” the video that Darnella took, the sermon that Peter preached in the court of accusation all tell us the same thing.

They all *exhort us* to *do* the same thing:

When the truth comes...about how we treat people or how we've been treated, or about even our need to accept salvation in Jesus, we must *accept* it...*repent*....*change direction* and *return* to God...and to each other.

Peter preaches that salvation — true and lasting reconciliation — can *only come* from the Prince of Peace who was killed by oppressive powers.

But his *body* couldn't stay dead.
His *kingdom* couldn't stay dead.
And his *message* couldn't stay dead.

And, therefore, there *is* no other name for reconciliation than the name of the living Jesus. There *is* no [other] name for the end of repression than Jesus. There *is* no [other] name for healing and justice and righteous...no other name than the name...of Jesus.

Salvation is only *in* the *name*, the *purpose*, the *plan*, and the *person* of Jesus.

So, what might the Lord be asking us to do?

On one hand, I believe the Lord is asking us to *listen* more:
Listen to the voice of the other.
Listen to the voices of those who are crying out because they are in pain...or crying out because they see their need for forgiveness.
And that when we hear those voices, to *turn* toward them.

And on the other hand, the Lord might be asking us to *risk* social place in order to *speak* the truth...politically and theologically.

Listen to the voices telling us to come to Jesus and surrender every area of our lives to him, or we risk going on in life totally oblivious and dismissive.

And to be clear, racism is a sin. It's not the only one, but it *is* a sin.

And Jesus has come to save us from that sin.

It is that *redemption* that we celebrate every time we come to the Lord's table.

And so...when that truth is proclaimed...what will we do?

Will we repent...and return...and follow where the shepherd Jesus leads us?

And will we be willing to persevere in resisting evil by *telling* the truth...no matter what it gets us?