

Pastor Joshua Janke
Risen Savior Lutheran Church, McFarland, WI

The Holy Spirit Changes Lives
Acts 5:12, 17-32
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On that first Easter, an angel spoke to the women, who came to a tomb expecting to anoint a dead body. The impact of that day was life changing. From fear and doubt to joy in their risen living Savior. But not every one of the disciples and apostles came to the same conclusion at the same time. In fact on that first evening the Apostles were behind locked doors. They were afraid of the very same group of people who had put Jesus to death on a cross. The ten Apostles minus Thomas saw and believed but Thomas was not there. A week later we have the event of our gospel lesson when Thomas saw and believed that Jesus was his Lord and Savior. In that setting Jesus told Thomas: “Because you have seen me, you have believed; blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed.” Jesus was addressing you and me who would hear the message of Jesus without seeing his risen body and believe that Jesus is our Lord and God. That message is good news for you and me who have our doubts and fears even today.

In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, the Holy Spirit, had Luke share the New Testament fulfillment of the gospel promises in the New Testament Church. Throughout the book of Acts we see again and again: “The Impact of Easter”. Today we consider the boldness of the Apostles. We come together on this day not here in the Church of Risen Savior in McFarland but on line at this time of Covid 19 and shuttered homes. We come together virtually with many thoughts and concerns about changes in our lives every day. The most powerful change that happens is the one God works in us. **The Holy Spirit Changes Lives I.** The doubting Apostles into bold witnesses **II.** The spiritually blind into bold confessors of the Christian faith

We listen to the words of Luke describe the events of Acts chapter five today. He is not describing the same attitude of the group of people we saw at the empty tomb or in a room behind closed doors. What changed? Jesus appeared to his disciples and Apostles again and again and again over 40 days. Jesus ascended in Acts 1. Jesus gave them marching orders: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” On Pentecost they received the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit made all of the Old Testament clear to the Apostles of why Jesus the Son of God had to walk this earth, suffer, die and rise again. In Acts chapter 3 and 4 Luke records miracle after miracle of the Apostles. The Apostles were given those gifts through the office of Apostleship. What changed? The Holy Spirit who had worked through the words of Jesus now worked in them and through them with the

same gospel message. What changed? The Holy Spirit changes lives. The Holy Spirit changed fearful Apostles into bold witnesses.

God's Word written by inspiration of the Holy Spirit caused Luke to write: "The apostles performed many miraculous signs and wonders among the people. And all the believers used to meet together in Solomon's Colonnade. 17 Then the high priest and all his associates, who were members of the party of the Sadducees, were filled with jealousy. 18 They arrested the apostles and put them in the public jail. 19 But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the jail and brought them out. 20 'Go, stand in the temple courts,' he said, 'and tell the people the full message of this new life.' (Acts 5:12, 17-20)." The miracles of the Apostles were the work of God. The group of 120 people in Acts 1 had become over 5,000 people. The ruling party called the Sadducees could not deny the miracles of the Apostles. The Sadducees were a priestly group but more concerned about political power. They were Jewish leaders and they rejected the truth of God's Word. They gave some allegiance to the books of Moses. Yet, at the same time they rejected the truth of the resurrection which Jesus had proved to them from the books of Moses. They were stiff in their opposition of the Apostles. They put them in jail. The same God who had raised Jesus from the dead sent his angel to set free the Apostles from jail. The angel told them: "Tell the people the full message of this new life."

Jesus began his ministry when he called his disciples around him. He told them to repent of their sins. He pointed out their imperfect relationship with a Holy righteous God. Jesus used people like Peter who denied Jesus. My dear friends we are not any less in need by nature than those first disciples. Without the knowledge of God which he brings to us we are not only fearful but clueless. The Holy Spirit by bringing us first to confess our sins and look to God for forgiveness. Jesus uses the good news about what he has done on the cross to bring us to faith through the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit changes lives through the message of Jesus. We would continue to be unbelievers. We would continue to claim not to know there is a God.

What is the impact of Easter on our lives? We have been set free from the law of God that would condemn us through the saving work of Jesus. The Holy Spirit brings this message to you and me through called men of God who have been called to proclaim this message. God uses male and female believers to encourage and strengthen us in our sharing time in the Word of God. The message of new life in Jesus proclaims us to be free to serve Jesus with our gifts and abilities. The message of new life unites us into Christians boldly working together like the early Christian church worked together proclaiming the message of Jesus Christ. That is why you exist as a congregation. That is your purpose. The Sadducees did not want to be made guilty of this man's (Jesus) blood. By nature we are no different. By grace God the Holy Spirit changes us. The difference between the apostles and us. They were witnesses of

everything Jesus did. Just like eyewitnesses in a court room who tell what they have seen. We have been called to faith through the work of the Holy to believe their testimony. We are called to confess that same truth about Jesus and his resurrection. **We are called confessors of that faith in Jesus.**

Change took place throughout the Apostles walk with Jesus. He walked with them and then sent them to share that same message of new life in Jesus. By nature we are spiritually dead without any ability to do God's will. By nature we are enemies with God and not able to cooperate or desire God. We continue in our lives opposed to God until God the Holy Spirit brings the message of repentance and forgiveness. We may continue many years in our life opposing God. Don't be like the Sadducees because those who oppose God will not win. They tried to wipe out the message of Jesus by killing him. God raised him from the dead. The Sadducees tried to quiet the Apostles by putting them in jail. The angel of God opened the jail to release them and send them proclaiming the message.

The Apostles were told to stop proclaiming this message about Jesus. The apostles followed the commands of God to respect the leaders that God had placed over them. “Peter and the other apostles replied: ‘We must obey God rather than men! 30 The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead—whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. 31 God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. 32 We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.’” The Holy Spirit changes our lives with the preaching of the gospel in Word and Sacraments. The opposition we face is real and significant whether from the world or the government. God wants to use you and me in bringing that message of new life to the next generation. Bring that message to your children and the people in your community. Grow in a knowledge of that truth by continuing in searching the Scriptures in your homes and at Risen Savior when you will have an opportunity to do so in the future. Tell the message of this new life to friends and neighbors. But first begin with believing and living this message of truth. The impact of Easter is powerful because God has given the message its power. Believe the message. The Holy Spirit changes lives. There are many opportunities to witness to people whose lives in this time of Covid 19 are disheartened and discouraged by financial debt, job loss, or even a virus effect on their body or loved ones. Perhaps they have doubts about God and His love for them. The Holy Spirit changed the doubting apostles into bold witnesses. The Holy Spirit changes lives: He changes the spiritually blind into bold confessors of the Christian faith. He has changed your life so that other people in your world may come to know the love of the living, risen Savior.

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