

ACTS 10:34-43
BELIEVE AND RECEIVE

This speech by Peter isn't made on Easter morning, but it could've been, and it has now been made to you. So put yourselves in the position of having heard from Peter. What stood out to you from his speech? Was it that God shows no partiality, but rather everyone who fears Him and does what is right is acceptable to Him? There's a big push these days to say that God loves everyone, everybody is acceptable to Him, everyone is going to heaven. Yet, people leave out that they need to fear God, and live according to His ways.

Why are you here this morning? Is it because you fear and love God and try to live according to His ways? Or are you here out of a sense of duty to some family member, or because it's just the thing to do on Easter Sunday? No matter what the reason is for you being here, it's good that you're here.

Maybe what stood out to you was that Jesus preached peace and good news and is Lord of all. When you listen to the news what's your hot topic: the Ukrainian – Russian war, or the Israeli / US – Iranian war, or the cost of gas because of the wars. Peace is a nice thought. Yet, peace on earth may not come until Jesus returns to judge the living and the dead.

Very few may have jumped for joy at that part of our reading, Jesus judging the living and the dead, but I do know that many here are looking at world events and wondering if these are signs that Jesus is coming back soon, and the world is shortly going to be brought to an end. When that end will be Jesus says no one knows, except God the Father. So, 'when', shouldn't be our focus, we just need to be ready for whenever that may be.

Yet, how does one get ready, or stay ready for an unknown date and time? All we can do is focus on Jesus. That's what Easter is about – Jesus. That's what our reading is about – Jesus. Maybe that's what stood out for you from our reading, that Peter summarizes Jesus from Baptism, through His ministry, to His death, resurrection and return, all in these short ten verses.

If you wanted to tell someone about Jesus here's a nice short summary. This is here in the Bible for you to learn about Jesus, and to tell others. Over and over again Peter talks about people knowing about Jesus, hearing about Jesus, seeing Jesus, and telling others about Jesus.

In this reading Peter talks about being commanded by God to preach about Jesus. Today I fulfill that roll, and you fulfill the role of those whom Peter spoke to. Some of you know well about Jesus, others not so much, and others not at all. So, you're the crowd whom Peter was speaking to. Some of this speaks directly to you, and the other stuff speaks to the person sitting

behind you. So, listen in as I go over Peter's speech and let him speak to you about Jesus.

You know what happened in Judea concerning Jesus starting right from the baptism of John the Baptist. You were a Sunday school teacher, you are a Sunday school teacher, you know this stuff. You were here two Sunday's ago and witnessed a baptism, and learned what happens in a baptism. You know that "when Jesus was baptized, immediately He went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to Him, and He saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on Him" (Matthew 3:16).

You know that passage. You likely read it many times to children. However, did you know that when Jesus was anointed with the Holy Spirit He was enabled to exercise all of His divine power in His human nature. The Holy Spirit is with Jesus in a much different way than He comes to us in our baptisms. That's because Jesus is both God and man. You may not have thought about that, but we're all learning about Jesus as we grow in our faith.

Our faith starts out in a simple way learning that Jesus did good things. Children learn that He was the nice guy. Jesus healed people. Jesus chased the devil away from people. When children are scared Jesus is someone they can turn to and trust in. God is with Jesus – again in a much different way than God is with us – but for a childlike faith that's all you need to know and trust in. God is with Jesus, and when you're with Jesus you're safe. That childlike faith can rest in children from ages 5 to 105, from birth to death.

And that's what Peter turns to next in his speech – death. People had witnessed Jesus doing all of these good things, saying good things, proclaiming peace, so why did they want to kill Him? Sadly we heard the answer to that also two Sundays ago. Amid the joys of celebrating a Baptism we had a reading from the gospel of John that told us, "the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the Council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ... So from that day on they made plans to put Him to death" (11:47-48, 53). Because of fear and jealousy they wanted to silence Jesus.

Good Friday was just three days ago. It's an important day in the church year. We can't really call it a celebration like we call today, Easter Sunday, a celebration. Good Friday is more like a funeral. The colours are not bright and white, but rather they're black or no colour at all. The Son of God has been put to death by mankind. Crucified on a cross. Good Friday is a sad day, but we call it good because it leads to today – three days later. As Peter said, God raised Jesus from the dead on the third day.

Now, think about our Gospel reading. Women went to a graveyard to anoint a dead body because that job couldn't be done on the day Jesus died. Imagine going to a cemetery, to the grave of a loved one only to find it dug open. We celebrate Easter too lightly when we don't consider this grave. Roman guards became like dead men because they were afraid of an angel who rolled back the stone they were guarding and sat on it.

Imagine the terror of Easter morning. It's not all sunshine and "He is Risen! He is Risen indeed!". It's earthquakes, rolling stones and a missing body. The angel tells the woman to not be afraid, but I'd be afraid and maybe freezing in fear like the guards.

An angel tells you that Jesus' body is not in the tomb, but rather He has risen from the dead. 'Go tell the disciples', the angel tells you. I think I'd be keeping that to myself. Like, who is going to believe me that the guy I buried three days ago is alive again? I might run away like the women did before anyone saw me near that cemetery. But the women don't get far before Jesus stops them and says, "Greetings!"

Peter says that the people who saw Jesus after He rose from the dead were chosen by God. Paul said that there were more than five hundred witnesses (1 Corinthians 15:6). To be one of those chosen witnesses might've been nice, but I don't think I would've wanted to be one of those women. Think of the shock of running into someone you just buried three days ago and they say, "Greetings!". We truly do treat Easter way too lightly.

Now think of what was the purpose of all this. It wasn't done for shock value, or to freeze a few Roman guards with fear. It was done for the forgiveness of your sins through the name of Jesus. Jesus' name and works are bound together for the purpose of faith, worship, adoration and your salvation. That's the purpose of Easter, so that you may believe in Jesus and receive the forgiveness of your sins and have eternal salvation.

When the true joy of Easter hits you, that Jesus lived for you, died for and rose from the grave for you so that you may have eternal life, your life will be filled with new meaning. You'll find yourself worshipping at the feet of Jesus. You'll find yourself being one of the witnesses our reading talks about and telling others about what you heard here today and the joy, comfort and hope it brings you knowing that you are forgiven. Maybe you even pass that forgiveness onto others, forgiving those who have hurt you.

God chose you to be witnessed to this morning. Maybe you didn't come here in faith and love of Jesus, but the hope is that you'll leave in faith and love, that in faith you'll eat and drink the body and blood of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins at Holy Communion, and that your life will be resurrected. He is Risen! He is Risen Indeed! Alleluia!