

## Acts 5:12, 17-32

<sup>12</sup>Many signs and wonders were done among the people through the hands of the apostles. With one mind, they all continued meeting in Solomon's Colonnade.

<sup>17</sup>The high priest rose up, along with his associates (that is, the party of the Sadducees), because they were filled with envy. <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 doors of the prison, brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup>"Go, stand in the temple and keep on telling the people the whole message about this life." <sup>21</sup>After they heard this, they entered the temple courts at daybreak and began to teach.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin (that is, the whole council of elders of the people of Israel). Then they sent orders to the jail to have the apostles brought in. <sup>22</sup>But when the officers arrived, they did not find them in the prison. They returned and reported, <sup>23</sup>"We found the prison securely locked and the guards standing at the doors, but when we opened them, we found no one inside!" <sup>24</sup>When the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests heard these words, they were puzzled about them, wondering what could have happened.

<sup>25</sup>Then someone came and reported to them, "Look! The men you put in prison are standing in the temple courts and teaching the people."

<sup>26</sup>Then the captain went with the officers and brought the apostles in without force, because they were afraid that the people might stone them. <sup>27</sup>After they brought them in, they had them stand before the Sanhedrin. The high priest asked them, <sup>28</sup>"Did we not give you strict orders not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man's blood down on us!"

<sup>29</sup>But Peter and the apostles replied, "We must obey God rather than men. <sup>30</sup>The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you arrested and killed by hanging him on a cross. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him to his right hand as Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him."

## Stand

### I.

Did you ever notice how honest some of the writers of Scripture are? I know, I know, the *real* author of the Bible is the Holy Spirit, who actually told the writers the very words and thoughts they were to record but, still... How embarrassing it must have been to put pen to parchment and record for posterity some very frank and unflattering details about themselves.

Take, for example, the chapter from which today's gospel comes. John had to admit: "They still did not yet understand the Scripture that he must rise from the dead" (John 20:9, EHV). John, who wrote these words, was one of the close disciples of Jesus. He was admitting in the gospel account that would echo throughout all the rest of time that he himself had been too thickheaded to get it when Jesus had told them he would rise from the dead.

Then, in today's gospel, John admitted: "On the evening of that first day of the week, the disciples were together behind locked doors because of their fear of the Jews" (John 20:19, EHV). Hiding. They were afraid. Thomas was not with them, and therefore got called out as one who doubted, but really all eleven of them had their doubts. That was why they were hiding behind locked doors in the first place.

Think of some of the other shameful behavior of these close personal friends of Jesus during the hours leading up to his trial and crucifixion and afterward. They wrote about their own failures to stay awake with Jesus and keep watch with him while he prayed in Gethsemane before his arrest. Boastful and bold and brash one minute when Judas came with the soldiers to arrest Jesus, fleeing in fear for their own skins the next—even leaving clothing behind if that

was deemed necessary to preserve their own personal safety. Later in the process of the trial of Jesus, the details about the depths of Peter's betrayal were laid bare for the world to see.

These were not bold men. These were not strong followers of Jesus. They didn't get it. Not for a long time.

Notice the patience of Jesus with them in today's gospel. "[Jesus] said to Thomas, 'Put your finger here and look at my hands. Take your hand and put it into my side. Do not continue to doubt, but believe'" (John 20:27, EHV).

## II.

What do you suppose might be the purpose of recording all these doubts and fears? Why the open and frank displays of the failings of Jesus' disciples?

Could it be because believers of all times and all places have experienced the same kinds of doubts? Could it be that *you* have sometimes doubted the Savior? Maybe you're not on such solid ground right now.

Easter for some seems as satisfying as a hollow chocolate bunny. It tastes good and is satisfying for a brief moment but, since it is hollow, it isn't long before it crumbles in your hand. As soon as the one day of Easter is over, you're back to your regular routine of life.

The message of Easter hasn't had its full effect on such an individual. He or she might even have been a long-time member of the church, but never really understood the message of the resurrection. Believe? Oh, sure! But when the rubber meets the road and adversity strikes, the message seems as hollow as the chocolate bunny. Jesus said to Thomas: "Because you have seen me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed" (John 20:29, EHV). But I *want* to see and touch, just like Thomas got to do. It would make things so much easier.

## III.

Jesus is patient; with you, with me, with Thomas, with the rest of the doubting and slow to understand disciples both then and now. John says in the gospel: "Jesus, in the presence of his disciples, did many other miraculous signs that are not written in this book. <sup>31</sup>But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:30, EHV).

In recording the doubts and worries and earthly concerns of Jesus' early followers, God has a purpose. They are there so we can see the power of the Lord Jesus. They are written down for us so the overwhelming evidence of the resurrection was recorded by people who had previously been skeptical. One eye witness account might not be accurate. With two there is a bit more certainty. With the dozens that were recorded and the hundreds of people the Apostle Paul had heard from who had seen the risen Lord speaking about the things they had heard and seen in his resurrection, the good news of salvation was firmly established. The things that have been written have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

No longer did they doubt, the Apostles once known as the disciples of Jesus. "With one mind, they all continued meeting in Solomon's Colonnade" (Acts 5:12, EHV). Where once they had hidden behind locked doors, now they went right out on the streets of Jerusalem. Fearlessly they stood in the temple courts and proclaimed that Jesus of Nazareth, who had been executed, truly was the Son of God and the Savior of the world. Without concern about the consequences they were bold in their proclamations.

"What good is fearlessness?" we might ask. It landed them in prison. "But during the night an angel of the Lord opened the doors of the prison, brought them out, and said, <sup>20</sup>Go, stand in the temple and keep on telling the people the whole message about this life.' <sup>21</sup>After they heard this, they entered the temple courts at daybreak and began to teach" (Acts 5:19-21, EHV).

Sprung from prison by an angel, the Apostles followed his direction and immediately went right back to proclaiming Jesus as the only way to heaven.

The high priest and the Sanhedrin were meeting to determine the fate of their prisoners, not realizing they had escaped by the hand of the Lord. When they discovered the prisoners gone, they sent the temple guard to re-arrest them. No longer were the Apostles the fear-filled disciples in the garden, intimidated by soldiers carrying swords and spears.

“Then the captain went with the officers and brought the apostles in without force, because they were afraid that the people might stone them” (Acts 5:26, EHV). No longer would these followers of their Savior run at the first sign of trouble, leaving even their clothing behind, if necessary. As Jesus did in Gethsemane, they calmly came in without incident.

“The high priest asked them, <sup>28</sup>‘Did we not give you strict orders not to teach in this name? Look, you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man’s blood down on us!’” (Acts 5:27-28, EHV). The highest religious authority among the Jews was directly challenging them. They had received instructions from the man purported to be the holiest in the nation. Why were they being insolent and belligerent and continuing to preach this Jesus against orders?

But the Apostles were following orders from a higher authority than the highest human religious authority in Jerusalem. They were following the instructions of God himself, relayed by the angel when they were released from prison. “Peter and the apostles replied, ‘We must obey God rather than men’” (Acts 5:29, EHV).

What a change! What a difference from the men who, only a few short weeks before this incident in the book of Acts, were cowering behind locked doors in fear for their lives from these very religious authorities!

How could they compromise the truth? They could not. “The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you arrested and killed by hanging him on a cross. <sup>31</sup>God exalted him to his right hand as Prince and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and the forgiveness of sins. <sup>32</sup>We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him” (Acts 5:30-32, EHV). Absolute insolence! Except...Peter and the others were acting at the direction of God the Holy Spirit himself, as they included in their witness. They had the truth, and the truth must get out.

#### IV.

The truth that Jesus is Prince and Savior, who has brought forgiveness of sins not only to Jews, but to Gentiles as well, must take precedence. Through their eyes, we have witnessed the same things. At times we cower in fear, like the Apostles did only a few weeks before. But the more you see and examine, the more you look at the things about Jesus that have been recorded that we may believe that he is the Christ, the Son of God, the better prepared you are to be bold and confident, just like Peter and his companions.

The deeper in to the Scriptures you dig the more you realize that God has given you every answer you need for all the issues in life. “Go, stand in the temple and keep on telling the people the whole message about this life” (Acts 5:20, EHV). The more you search the Scriptures the more you realize that God has given you the greatest answers of all—you have the answers that lead to *eternal* life. Just like the Apostles, you heed the angel’s call to go and stand—stand on the Word of God and proclaim the great things the Lord has done for you and for your salvation—and for the salvation of the world. Proclaim it first by living your life as one who has heard these things and believes what the Lord has told you. Just like the disciples, the more you learn of it and live it, the bolder you will become to proclaim it with your lips, as well as with your life. God bless your stand on the solid ground of the Lord Jesus and his resurrection. Amen.