

**"Resurrection Witness"**  
**(Acts 5:27-32)**  
**April 24, 2022**

On Easter Day, the disciples were afraid and unsure of what they saw. They were perplexed. However, not too long after that, they behaved differently significantly. They no longer locked themselves behind closed doors but moved around and started talking to people in public. They had a rare experience to share with everyone. The gospel and the kingdom of God Jesus told them had started to spread and grow, just like seeds that break their dormancy and begin to germinate. The empty tomb and appearance of the resurrected Jesus to his disciples convinced them that death doesn't have the last word. In Jesus' case, death showed its impotence and served only the purpose of opening up a new chapter for life.

In today's scripture, the captain of the temple guard and his officers brought Peter and the other apostles before the Sanhedrin - a Jewish court of seventy men made up of the Pharisees and Sadducees, headed apparently by the high priest. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name," they said to Peter and the other apostles. So, it was not the first time they appeared in front of these Jewish authority figures. They got the full attention of the general public through teaching and works, which were a continuation of what Jesus had started. Naturally, this made the high priest and all his associates who were members of the Sadducees jealous. (Acts 5:17) They had arrested the apostles and put them in public jail. But they broke out of the prison and started teaching again in the temple courts the next day. Do you know how the general public reacted to their appearance? The captain and his officers had to proceed more

carefully when they arrested the apostles again because they feared that the people would stone them. (Acts 5: 26)

If we want to benefit ourselves the most from reading today's scripture, we can try to position ourselves in different contexts. Remember, Peter and the other apostles were Jews, just like the Pharisees and Sadducees. So no matter how they talked, argued, or even criticized themselves, it has nothing to do with anti-Semitism. And it's not the route we should follow. If we pick ourselves as an individual as the context, do we see the tensions between us and the friends or family members closest to us? Other than wearing masks and taking vaccination, there are more that we disagree with each other. If we pick our local church as the context, do we see that our concerns are never at the tables of the various committees in the church for consideration? Some find music the most important part of church life. But what about prayer, fellowship, outreach, faith nurture, or an integrated approach with all the mentioned components pulled together? Canada is a big country in terms of area. Ontario is not by a coastline, but why is it being an Ontarian not inferior at all when compared to the other provinces and territories? And if you want an even more significant challenge, take the whole world as our context. What are your suggestions when facing ideologies, religions, ethical challenges, scientific breakthroughs, spiritual awakening experiences, and new and old practices coming from all directions?

The interactions between the religious groups we encountered this morning can be good examples if we read the text more carefully. For example, the high priest and other Sadducees in the council didn't believe in the resurrection of the dead. They refused to go beyond the written Torah. They only held on to the traditional Jewish concept of Sheol, also translated as "hell." So to

say, death for them has the final word on life. They felt comfortable dedicating themselves to living in the present only, i.e., following written rules and enjoying the power, wealth, and fame that came with their existence. I wonder if you see images of yourselves among them. I'm surprised if you don't. That's how most of us grew up. "Listen to your father," "Listen to your mom," "Listen to the teacher," and "Listen to the police officer." Until one day, we hear, "Listen to the politician," then we wake up.

In today's text, the wake-up call is not from a politician but someone with a name that even the high priest didn't want to mention. "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name." What name? "Yet here you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching, and you are determined to bring this man's blood on us." Oh, it's a man. The high priest and the Sadducees thought they had erased that name forever. Sheol is the place where that dead person should be resting. It's not worth it to mention the name anymore. Is that so? Peter and the other apostles disagreed with that, of course. "The God of our ancestors raised up Jesus, whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree." They were not happy when the high priest silenced them. They dared to bring the name of Jesus back to the table and point out the wrongdoings the Jewish authority did to him.

Do you remember if you had a similar experience, silenced when you were with your friends or relatives? "Shh!" could be a negative thing. Some might perceive it as an approval of bullying, home violence, or abuse of substances. Ontario is a great place to live in. The OHIP system is great. There are over a hundred spectacular provincial and national parks. You know what? The telephone, basketball, the first light bulb, and insulin were all invented by Ontarians or in Ontario. Are you familiar with the inspiring stars with artistic and

athletic talents from Ontario? "Shh!" could be a positive thing too, as it reminds us how terrible it is to live as a poor in a rich and famous area. Do you think Canada is more comparable to communism or capitalism? We are somewhere in the middle. "Shh!" won't create us a better platform to face this reality. Canada emphasizes the concept of "mosaic". It's a melting pot that allows different cultures to blend and integrate. The only way to ensure its future is to face its changing reality fair and square. "Shh!" won't help.

Have you ever found sermons hard to understand, hymns unfamiliar, prayers too liturgical? "Shh!" Then you'll never see improvement. There might be modifications, but not in the direction that you expected.

Once a man crippled from birth asked Peter and John for alms. Peter said, "I don't have a nickel to my name, but what I do have, I give you: In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk!" (Acts 3: 6) When someone ask us for something, do you think we would say the same? The first part of our answer would probably be the same, "I have no money," "my budget for donation this month has been used up," but what about the second part? We don't work miracles like Peter, but we do bear witness to our Easter faith? The miracle we offer to the orphaned, hungry, and oppressed is our love and compassion. To the ones who seek faith in other ways, through other texts, with other worshipping communities, the miracle we could offer is to listen and share ours as equals. Not in a pounding way, but in Jesus' way, who won't brush aside the bruised and the hurt, nor disregard the small and insignificant, but steadily and firmly set things right. (Isaiah 42:3, The Message)

"We must obey God rather than any human authority." And the human authority includes me, us, our prejudices, our reluctance to step forward and change. So, are we ready to break some rules? Stop silencing people, and stop being silenced.

It's storytime.

There were rules in the monastery, but the master always warned against the tyranny of the rules.

"Obedience keeps the rules, keeps the establishment running," he explained, "but love gears towards living souls. It knows when to break the rules."

Last Sunday, the disciples were in the upper room, perplexed by what they saw and what they heard about the resurrection of Jesus. This week, we heard them proclaiming the risen Christ confidently. Our call as a faith community is to grow in the story and witness what we know. And what do we know about Peter and the other apostles? They embraced the Easter miracle and committed themselves to accepting all that comes after it, including joy and sorrow, clarity and confusion, celebration and persecution. You know what? Their witnesses convinced some Pharisees, and they offered help to the apostles. (Acts 5: 34-40) Let us follow their steps, not to fear or endure this world, but transform it and be transformed, in God's name. Amen.