

Devotion: Tuesday, April 21, 2020

Acts 2:14a, 36-41

14 But Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: 'Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say.

³⁶Therefore let the entire house of Israel know with certainty that God has made him both Lord and Messiah, this Jesus whom you crucified.'

37 Now when they heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and to the other apostles, 'Brothers, what should we do?' ³⁸Peter said to them, 'Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. ³⁹For the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him.' ⁴⁰And he testified with many other arguments and exhorted them, saying, 'Save yourselves from this corrupt generation.' ⁴¹So those who welcomed his message were baptized, and that day about three thousand persons were added.

In his book, *Lament for a Son*, Christian theologian Nicholas Wolterstorff comments on his life after his 25-year-old son's sudden death in a mountain-climbing accident. It's a classic description of a personal crisis:

"The world looks different now. ... Something is *over*. In the deepest levels of my existence, something is finished, done. My life is divided into before and after."

Struck a chord in me.

WE are in a crisis. I know there will be a time in the future when one of my great-grandchildren will ask me "What did you do in the great Corona Crisis great papa Jack?"

And I will answer proudly, "I served from home!"

If you watch any news channel feed, you know by the prevalent backdrop of red, that we are in a crisis.

Step outside and you will notice that everyone, even the kids, look like they are just about to rob a liquor store.

Our beloved Easter Church service was different, because we are in crisis mode.

Which put me in mind that the resurrection was a crisis.

When the laws of biology and reality are turned upside down, you have a crisis. An Easter crisis.

Afterward, there was an Easter crisis that forced the people of Jerusalem to decide whether they were going to oppose Jesus or support him, whether they were going to serve an earthly king or a heavenly Messiah.

The Easter crisis was a turning point, one that had enormous consequences for the people of Jerusalem. The choice was bigger than any crisis points in U.S. history, times in which people had to choose. The Boston Tea Party. The Declaration of Independence. The Abolition Movement. The Civil War. The First World War. The New Deal. The Second World War. The Civil Rights Movement. The Environmental Movement. On and on.

All have been turning points. Shocks to the system. Times of decision. Crisis points. But they are no bigger than the question raised by the book of Acts: What would the people of Jerusalem choose?

Acts tells us that those who welcomed Peter's message "were baptized, and that day about 3,000 persons were added" (v. 41). Three thousand new Christians! An unexpected and truly stunning response. And then we learn that they "devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and fellowship, to the breaking of bread and the prayers" (v. 42)

The Easter Crisis led to the rapid growth of the Christian church, from a handful of apostles to a crowd of newly baptized Christians. But instead of creating chaos, this explosive growth was quickly organized by teaching, fellowship, breaking of bread, and prayers. In other words the Church.

This story from Acts reminds me that the days after the Easter Rising were not just a happy time in which the followers of Jesus gave thanks for the gift of the resurrection. No, the rising created a crisis, and the church responded by organizing itself to continue the ministry and mission of Jesus in the world.

Today, we are experiencing a crisis — the Easter Crisis of 2020. So let's respond by imitating the Jerusalem Christians, who followed the risen Jesus and launched a movement that changed the world.

Face it, we have nothing better to do right now.

Let us pray:

Companion God, we hear the pain of our world and pray —for all for whom this new day is the beginning of life; for all who face new ventures and challenges; for the people engulfed by loneliness, despair or grief, for all who feel cast off from your presence; for all who are walled in by circumstance and whose lives are exhausted; for all this day who will find their rest in you.

In your mercy, journey with all whom we name in word and silence ...By the presence of your Spirit of mystery and grace encourage us in the days ahead so that we can go faithfully as sisters and brothers of the risen One, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Blessings, Pastor Jack