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July 7, 2019
Acts 5:17-41
Advice from Gamaliel

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 all about this new life.”

²¹ At daybreak they entered the temple courts, as they had been told, and began to teach the people.

When the high priest and his associates arrived, they called together the Sanhedrin—the full assembly of the elders of Israel—and sent to the jail for the apostles. ²² But on arriving at the jail, the officers did not find them there. So they went back and reported, ²³ “We found the jail securely locked, with the guards standing at the doors; but when we opened them, we found no one inside.” ²⁴ On hearing this report, the captain of the temple guard and the chief priests were at a loss, wondering what this might lead to.

²⁵ Then someone came and said, “Look! The men you put in jail are standing in the temple courts teaching the people.” ²⁶ At that, the captain went with his officers and brought the apostles. They did not use force, because they feared that the people would stone them.

²⁷ The apostles were brought in and made to appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. ²⁸ “We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name,” he said. “Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man’s blood.”

²⁹ Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings! ³⁰ The God of our ancestors raised Jesus from the dead—whom you killed by hanging him on a cross. ³¹ God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might bring Israel to repentance and forgive their sins. ³² We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”

³³ When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death. ³⁴ But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. ³⁵ Then he addressed the Sanhedrin: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men. ³⁶ Some time ago Theudas appeared, claiming to be somebody, and about four hundred men rallied to him. He was killed, all his followers were dispersed, and it all came to nothing. ³⁷ After him, Judas the Galilean appeared in the days of the census and led a band of people in revolt. He too was killed, and all his followers were scattered. ³⁸ Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

⁴⁰ His speech persuaded them. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

⁴¹ The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name. ⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah.

Jesus has ascended to heaven. The followers of Jesus are left to survive alone. No, not just to survive. Since Pentecost, we have been living together with the disciples receiving and experiencing the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who was giving them a life of courage, boldness, assurance and joy enabling them to live life with a new purpose and new power. Last Sunday was scary. Ananias and Sapphira died right in the eyes of everybody because they lied not only to the community but also to God. In spite of this, maybe even because of this, the community of believers continued to grow.

In today's long reading we learn that the apostles were put back in jail again. Why? They were talking about Jesus again. They had been released from prison the first time on the condition that they would stop preaching about Jesus. Isn't it interesting that they thought that they could lock up the gospel! You can lock up people, but you cannot lock up the gospel! After seeing the well-known lame man walking, the fate of Ananias and Sapphira, and the many miracles, how is it that instead of receiving and believing, all these high priests, all the teachers, all people of the knowledge and status, are filled with rage. They were willing to do anything just to stop hearing and seeing how the group of Jesus' followers grows. They were filled with jealousy.

I think of my world today. Even though I am not a person with high powers and status, I can relate to what it means. In a week or so I will be going to Wisconsin to meet with a youth group coming from Lithuania to visit their partnership churches. I was invited by the Global Ministries "In Mission Together" coordinator to come and I wanted to go.

United Methodist clergy are required to observe professional courtesy. I had to get permission from the Lithuania bishop. The pastor of the host church had to agree that it is ok for me to come because as a pastor I may not cross boundaries. The youth group has their own pastor. I am no longer their pastor. Partially I can understand. If I am appointed to a church it would be very hard to have the previous pastor come and start working here as a pastor and making all the decisions, doing all the pastoral duties.

It was a nuisance to clear all the hurdles and jump through all the hoops, but those are the rules put in place by people much higher than me.

I believe you can relate. Think of the people who have authority over you. They have power and status and you do not like it. In the military you obey the person of higher rank whether you like it or not and whether you like the officer or not.

The disciples were put in jail because they were not following protocol. They had been told to stop and they did not and could not. The leaders saw a threat to their power, reputation and religion. New things are starting and the authorities are not able to stop any of it.



The angel of the Lord came and released the disciples in the night. What did the angel say? "Go back into the temple courts and tell again to all the people about this new life.

Is that not what got them in prison in the first place? The angel released them from the jail only to them send back in to the exact same danger. We all could rejoice and praise God for rescuing them. We can all be encouraged that God comes to us in the midst of our most difficult situations. Yes, he releases us but for what reason?

Why does God heal and restore? Why does God redeem us? Why does God give us the Holy Spirit? For one reason: so we can proclaim the gospel. God freed them physically in order to free others spiritually. It is the call for all of us. The angel said, "Go and tell about this new life". New Life. Notice that the term "Christianity" had not yet been coined. It is called New Life. Do you talk about New Life you have in Jesus?

On July 19th our church will have a marvelous opportunity to share the New Life offered in Christ Jesus. You do not have to wonder where are the people that I can share the gospel. You do not have to figure out where to go. These people are coming to us. 150 people signed up to come and eat lunch with us. I am so excited and proud of New Life UMC. I can truly hear Jesus is saying, "I am bringing all that crowd into your parking lot. What are you going to do about it. Yes, distributing the food from the Gleaners truck is good, but can we treat them as most valued guests: guests we are waiting for with great anticipation.

Many of these people are weary and struggling with life. They long for hope and their souls are hungry. What if there are individuals in this crowd that only you can relate to and share how God offers New life? Jesus says: "Feed the hungry, love your neighbor, share the gospel. If there is any way you can come, please come. It is a call for us to be Christ's representatives to our guests.

The disciples were sent back to the center of the community – back into the place where all the people gathered. They were directed to go back again out of the comfort zone and literally be in danger. So they did. Very early in the morning all the disciples were back in the temple courts. When the full assembly of the elders of Israel got together, they wanted to bring the disciples out of jail so they could question them again.

The good news was that the guards were still there and the jail securely locked. The bad news was that the disciples were not there. Why is it that some people, just can't get it? They see miracles, they see God's power at work and they still refuse to give up their life, their power, their status.

Too often we only think of God as good when we can have control. It means God is cooperating with my will. If I can control, live the way I want to live, plan and have my way then faith in God is pretty good deal. Instead God invites us to cooperate with Him and His purpose. We are not sure about that: do not ask me to surrender, do not ask me to give up my power and status, to love with a crazy love.

The disciples were found in the temple preaching and brought before the Sanhedrin: the top elite, most respected religious people. The high priest said: "We gave you strict orders not to teach in this name. Yet you have filled Jerusalem with your teaching and are determined to make us guilty of this man's blood."

None us like to be accused of murder. The Sanhedrin, especially felt it to be slander against their reputation. They kept God's laws better than anyone else.

The disciples were consumed with Jesus. They had a new understanding. "This Jesus whom you crucified." – not "Whom the Romans crucified".

As the poet wrote in stanza 2 of hymn # 289:

Who was the guilty? Who brought this upon thee?

Alas, my treason, Jesus, hath undone thee!
 'Twas I, Lord Jesus, I it was denied thee;
 I crucified thee.



Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than human beings!”

When they heard it they became furious. These followers of Jesus were not submitting to their power. These men were even blaming them for crucifying Jesus whom they say was innocent.

Everybody knew that God lived in the Temple and worked through it to bring forgiveness and salvation to his people. The chief priests of course were quite clear that God simply could not be in this New Life.

In their rage they wanted to kill all these men, but a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honored by all the people, stood up.

Gamaliel was the grandson of the famous Hebrew scholar, Hillel. Gamaliel was the head of the training center for Pharisaism. Everyone called him “Our teacher”. He was honored by all the people;

One of his pupils was from the town of Tarsus, by the name of Saul. Saul’s name was changed to Paul after his conversion.



Gamaliel “stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the disciples be put outside for a little while”. Gamaliel shared two examples from past – Theudas and Judas. He pointed out that there have been movements, other rebellions, other uprisings. but after the leader was killed it all disappeared. He went on to say: “³⁸ Therefore, in the present case I advise you: Leave these men alone! Let them go! For if their purpose or activity is of human origin, it will fail. ³⁹ But if it is from God, you will not be able to stop these men; you will only find yourselves fighting against God.”

They wanted to act fast. How many of us say things and do things just because we are angry?

Gamaliel did not speak because he believed in what disciples doing. We will see soon, that Saul was sent by him to persecute and kill followers of Christ. However, his advice is something for all of us to consider. First, he is saying: Be patient. Do not act

out of your feelings. Second, he is saying: Leave off from these man. Let them be. If this plan is human origin, it will come to ruin. If it is from God – well, you won't be able to stop them. You might even be found to be fighting against God.

God, YAWEH, the One you are trying to protect, does not need your protection. God is quite capable of taking care of Himself. Gamaliel was right. We worship God but we have little tolerance for someone who might serve God differently. You just might find yourself fighting against a new life that God is starting.

When Mary anointed Jesus with the expensive perfume. The disciples were indignant. They were critical of the waste. She was worshiping Jesus in a way that no other follower of Jesus had ever done before. They wanted to chase her out of the room. Jesus commanded, "Leave her alone!!! She has done a good thing."

Are we able to be tolerant and patient with those who are seeking to worship and obey with all of their heart?

We still are called to stand and obey God. Sometimes I am not sure I like some Christian teachings or worship styles. Sometimes I do not like the way they do ministries. I have to remind myself that we know by the fruit they bear. We do not decide about the tree from how the tree looks, but from its fruit? You have to wait to see the fruit.

Gamaliel's speech persuaded them to not kill the disciples. They called the apostles in and had them flogged. Then they ordered them not to speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

Do not speak in the name of Jesus. Sadly, we do not need anyone to make such a command to us. We are afraid of what people will think if we talk about God and declare what God has done through Christ Jesus. We are nervous about obeying what God teaches us through the Bible. Then we wonder why we are not experiencing God's blessing.

We are challenged by Paul's words in Romans 1:16. "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ unto salvation to everyone who believes."

"The apostles left the Sanhedrin, rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name."

This is probably the most difficult part to understand. With their backs still bleeding from the flogging, they rejoiced over the honor of suffering disgrace for the name of the Jesus. We spend our lives seeking comfort and ease and relaxation. That is the paradox of the Gospel. These things do not give joy and purpose and fulfillment. To find hope and courage and joy and peace is to obey the leading of the Holy Spirit no matter the cost or danger to your reputation.

⁴² Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Messiah". In so doing, the apostles were rejoicing.

When you believe and you do what is crazy to the world you receive an abundance. When you are very busy and think you have no time you give time to the Lord, this time is never wasted and somehow you are able to do even better in shorter time. You feel like you cannot really forgive, but you forgive not because you want to but because you believe. You cannot give because you do not have much, but God never robs you. God blesses you. You do not want to talk about God because we think it is dangerous, but somehow true peace comes when we share the gospel.