

Second Sunday of Easter

April 12, 2026

Text: Acts 5:29-42 (First Reading)

Other Texts: 1 Peter 1:3-9 (Epistle); John 20:19-31 (Gospel)

“For Such a Faith”

Christ is risen! *He is risen indeed!* Alleluia!

Near the end of our First Reading from the book of Acts, we hear some potentially confusing, possibly unsettling, yet completely amazing words, “Then they left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name.”¹ So what happened to this group of men who had been hiding behind locked doors?

After Jesus’ resurrection and ascension, and with the coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, a great change had taken place in them. (A change, by the way, which can only be reasonably explained by their actually seeing the risen Jesus, speaking, eating, and even touching Him.) The risen Lord appointed them to proclaim “repentance for the forgiveness of sins in his name.”² And they went out, boldly proclaiming the Word. And that their message would be shown to be from God, they were given the ability to work many signs and wonders: healing various diseases and infirmities and casting out demons, so much so that God even worked healing through Peter’s shadow.³ And many repented and believed in Jesus as the Christ.

But while many embraced this message, certainly it was not all, not even the majority of the Jews. And especially not the ruling council (Sanhedrin). After being imprisoned, the apostles were brought before the council. And they were charged for preaching in Jesus’ name which they had been commanded not to do. And so today’s text begins,

“We must obey God rather than men. The God of our fathers raised Jesus, whom you killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him at his right hand as Leader and Savior, to give repentance to Israel and forgiveness of sins. And we are witnesses to these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.”⁴

We must obey God rather than men. These words instruct us in a lasting principle for all Christians. What God commands we must do, even if human authority forbids it. What God prohibits we must never do, even if human authority demands it. Yes, lawful government has God’s own authority behind it, but when the government contradicts His Word, then they have stepped outside of their lawful bounds and must not be obeyed. This principle applies whenever we must choose between doing what God commands or forbids as it is clearly revealed in the Bible and obeying the laws or commands of any human authority which contradicts it. This is by no means a license to disobey the government in other situations. It is written, “Be subject for the

¹ Acts 5:41. All quotes are from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version (ESV)* unless otherwise noted.

² Luke 24:47.

³ E.g. Acts 5:12, 15-16.

⁴ Acts 5:29-32.

Lord's sake to every human institution...For this is the will of God."⁵ But God remains over all.

Of course, this principle which we must follow is not popular with those authorities who are in rebellion against the Almighty. It definitely wasn't with the Sanhedrin, "When they heard this, they were enraged and wanted to kill them."⁶ In this particular instance, the well-respected Pharisee Gamaliel spoke words of "wait and see." Earthly wisdom perhaps, but in reality nothing more than indecision as his own work-righteousness blinded him to his own guilt, leading him to ignore Peter's, and God's, call to repent. Yet his words did cool them down. A bit.

They didn't kill the apostles. They let them go, but not until they had "beat them and charged them not to speak in the name of Jesus."⁷ They received "the forty lashes less one,"⁸ either thirty-nine blows with a rod or thirteen blows with a leather scourge of three knotted thongs. Either way, very painful. Either way, openly disgraceful. A punishment for their disobeying the council and proclaiming Jesus. A warning to stop. A hurt and insult to shut them up. Then we hear of their confusing, unsettling, yet amazing response: "They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name."

Their response is confusing because it seems to be oxymoronic, contradictory. They rejoiced in their suffering and pain; they felt their disgrace showed them worthy, that they were being honored, by suffering open dishonor and humiliation. It just doesn't make sense.

Their response is unsettling, troubling, even discouraging. They rejoiced over their suffering for the name of Jesus. But let's be honest, *we don't want to suffer*. The world, that is, our culture, teaches that suffering is bad and to be avoided. Many religions teach that suffering and hardships must be signs of God's displeasure, even anger. Not a few Christian teachers have the same basic message: faithfulness brings blessings, not suffering. And so we are somewhat troubled hearing a text like this. Fearful that God might actually expect us to suffer. And not just in normal ways that unbelievers experience, but suffer for His name, that is, bearing the cross.

Yet, their response is amazing. Because despite our confusion and feeling of unsettlement, we cannot but be amazed at the dedication, yes, *the faith* of the apostles. And even as we don't want to be called to imitate them, deep down we hope that we would be as faithful as they were if we needed to be, even as we fear that we will not be. In fact, that might be the most discouraging aspect of hearing of the apostles rejoicing in their suffering: knowing that they all suffered severe persecution, that all but one endured the most gruesome martyrdom, and that they remained faithful through it all. Great for them, but we think that we could never do the same. So the greater our amazement at them, at their strong faith, comes the equally great dismay at ourselves, at the weakness of our faith.

We in this land rarely think of overt suffering for our faith in Christ, much less dying for it. Oh sure, we make that promise in our Confirmation vows, that by the grace of God we "intend to

⁵ 1 Peter 2:13, 15.

⁶ Acts 5:33.

⁷ Acts 5:40.

⁸ A standard form of punishment in Judaism. Paul received this five times (2 Corinthians 11:24). This punishment is based upon God's instruction in Deuteronomy 25:3 where forty blows is the maximum.

continue steadfast in this confession and Church and to suffer all, even death, rather than fall away from it.”⁹ But do we really think it will come *to that*? And we sadly recognize how many others over the years have not kept their promise, not even as far as remaining faithful to the confession they made,¹⁰ to the church in which they were confirmed,¹¹ even though they haven’t suffered for Jesus’ name, much less been threatened with martyrdom. Not much encouragement for us there should we consider actually being persecuted as Christians.

Yet, even now the devil and his minions, spiritual and human (the world), are active around us. They tempt us into sin and unbelief. Within divinely set limits, they take from us whatever they can, and harm what they cannot take. They work to fill us with doubt. Doubt about Christ, about the truthfulness of the Word, about our forgiveness, about our ability to remain faithful in suffering and persecution. And by such doubts they work to replace faith with fear.

Dear Christians, I don’t like trying to get into the minds of others. I cannot read my wife’s mind (she’s made that clear!), so how can I read the minds of those who died just short of two thousand years ago. Yet, for just a moment I’m going to make a guess. And my guess is that the apostles’ attitude of rejoicing in their suffering, of being honored by being dishonored before others, all for Jesus’ sake, *probably surprised them too*. After all these were the same guys who were hiding behind locked doors for fear of suffering. The guys who, in their desire for honor and prestige before others, had argued about who was the greatest in the kingdom. Wow, did they change! And it was not a change that they worked, but it was worked within them.

And so it is with us, you and me. True, the human will and natural affection can be pretty impressive. Soldiers and Marines jumping into combat which could likely lead to their death. Parents endangering themselves to save their children. True, unbelievers can do such things. But let us not forget that the human will and natural affection are still from God the Father who created mankind. But more, when the Holy Spirit takes up residence within a person, there is enhanced natural powers and, more, there is a new creation. The new man that fears losing Christ more than losing honor or life, which loves Christ more than honor and life, and which trusts Christ to save life, maybe here, but certainly eternally; the Christ who will honor His people, rewarding their suffering for Him in this life, with ever greater degrees of glory in heaven.

And there is also spiritual training. Think about how it is with kids. The first time they are to do something, going down a big slide, diving into the deep end of the pool, riding their bike or a roller coaster, whatever, they are often scared. Yet, after doing it, you can’t get them to stop! It’s fun! Now while suffering as a Christian is not *fun*, there is a point of comparison. For it has been reported by those who have suffered for Christ that, though the hurt was real, yet it felt good. There was a true joy in confessing Christ and His Word, even though it brought them rebuke, rejection, worse. Sometimes fear of the unknown, the first time, is the worst. So God permits a first time so that we’re stronger, ready for a second, a third, whatever He determines.

⁹ Rite of Confirmation, *Lutheran Service Book*, p. 273.

¹⁰ This refers to the confession of faith of the Evangelical Lutheran Church as drawn from Scriptures and learned in Luther’s Small Catechism. It must be stated that the Evangelical Lutheran Church is the historic name given to the churches that hold to the Book of Concord of 1580 and so it does not refer to the ELCA church body which holds neither to Scripture or the Lutheran Confessions.

¹¹ This is not limited to St. John’s alone, but is referring to the churches united in the fellowship of The Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod of which St. John’s is a voluntary member.

And so it is that the truths St. Peter wrote about in the Epistle are shown. That enduring trials of faith tests the genuineness of it, both proving it real even as it purifies it. That enduring trials of faith does actually lead to inexpressible joy because this stronger, purer faith, by the life of faithfulness and holy virtues it brings forth in us, gives glory and honor to Christ even as it finally receives its outcome, the salvation of our souls. The souls which our dearest Savior died.

For Christ Jesus was dishonored, shamed, and killed in the most excruciating way, even suffering hell on the cross, to forgive our sins and save us from the disgrace and torments of hell. And in their place He gives us the honor of heavenly glory and the joys of the resurrection in the world to come, the world without end.

God grant us such a faith that we imitate the apostles in rejoicing in our suffering and dishonor for Christ Jesus now in the certain hope that we will then imitate them in the glories that await us. Amen!