

Easter 2, 2010
Good Hope Lutheran Church
Acts 5: 27 – 28

From the book of the Acts of the Apostles, chapter 5. The disciples of Jesus stood before the Jewish council in Jerusalem, and the high priest questioned them. “We told you not to talk about Jesus,” he said, “and yet here you are, filling the whole city with His teaching. You are determined to bring His blood upon us!”

The Word of God. And we pray:

Lord Jesus we thank you for the witness of your first disciples, who in word and deed proclaimed your death and resurrection in Jerusalem, and throughout the world. Give us that sort of boldness, give us that sort of faith, and let it be that your blood may always be upon us, and our children, unto life everlasting. Lord Jesus in your name we pray, AMEN.

Today’s story is from Acts 5, and it takes place a *very* short time after the events of Easter itself. The roller coaster ride of that last week—Jesus’ triumphant entry into Jerusalem on Palm Sunday, the crowds going wild; the behind the scenes political maneuvering to get Him arrested, the tension on Thursday and Friday surrounding His actual death and burial and then to top it off, Sunday morning when His body turned up missing!—that whole chaotic week was still fresh in everyone’s mind. Including the minds of the people who, really didn’t like Jesus that much. And just when you thought things were beginning to quiet down, here we go again, here come the *disciples* of Jesus, claiming He’s been raised from the dead! That’s why His body’s missing—He’s been raised from the dead! Well the high priest and

the others on the council, they just wanted this whole Jesus thing to go away, but no, here are these disciples, spreading Jesus' teaching, claiming a resurrection, making it harder on us than ever, "Listen you guys!" said the high priest. "We told you to knock it off! But instead you seem determined to bring this man's blood upon us."

It's that last sentence, we need to think about. We need to get this, "You are determined to bring this man's blood upon us," what does that mean? Any ideas? Now what the high priest himself probably meant. What the high priest himself probably meant is pretty straight forward, or so it seems to me. "You want to bring His blood upon us, in other words, you are determined to blame us for His death. You are determined to make our guilt clear, you are determined. To make us pay." That's probably what the high priest himself meant, and feared; and we have to be honest, that's what an awful lot of Christians the last 2000 years have meant as well. The history of Christianity is full of anti-Semitism, and it's pretty ugly. All Christians have a burden to bear here, and for us, it's a heavier burden than most—I mean show me a Nazi after all, and I'd probably be able to show you a Lutheran. The Nazis during the Holocaust quoted Luther extensively, and I have to tell you, they did NOT take him out of context—they got the quotes right. There is a lot in the Lutheran heritage that is absolutely toxic on the subject of anti-Semitism,

and we have to be upfront about that. The high priest in Acts 5 wondered, Are you followers of Jesus trying to make the Jewish people pay for His death? And to our shame Christians for 2000 years including Lutherans have largely answered, Yeah.

But is that really what this verse means? Blame the Jews, is that it? Or at the crucifixion itself, when the crowds in Jerusalem that day all shouted, His blood be upon us and our children!—what does *that* mean? When the high priest in Acts 5, when the chosen people in Matthew 27 say that His blood is upon them—*what did God hear them saying?* What did God hear, well let me put it this way. What do we mean when *we* say, His blood is upon us, His blood covers us—what do *we* mean? Referring to the blood of Jesus, you know perfectly well that's a standard Christian way of saying I was guilty, but I have been forgiven. I was guilty, but Jesus shed His blood for me, His blood covers me, His blood washes me, His blood avails for me, I was guilty, I was. But I have been forgiven, Jesus shed His blood and His blood is on me it covers me too so what I would like to suggest. The best way to read Matthew 27 during Holy Week, and the best way to read Acts 5 today: It's a prayer, one we utter too. A prayer spoken by someone who may not have even known he was praying, exactly. May the blood of Jesus, cover me. I was guilty, but may I now also find forgiveness of sin, life, and

salvation; may God be merciful, even to one like me. And that's a prayer I believe, our God is very eager to hear, and accept, from anyone.

Well, here we are today, shortly after Easter. As in Jerusalem all those years ago, so also in Arlington and southern Hancock county now—it's been pretty chaotic around here lately. Lots of extra worship services, lots of extra work, we've had soup suppers and Easter breakfasts and brass quintets and Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat, we've got VBS and confirmation and new ministry proposals; funerals; church church church—you're probably ready to give it a rest. You may have heard enough for a few weeks, no offense pastor but can this Jesus thing go away for just a little while? I mean do you see the weather outside, how nice it is all of a sudden? Can't we just give this Jesus thing a rest, for a while, maybe?

No. No, see, like the apostles of old, I am determined to bring this man's blood upon you. I am determined to make you understand, that you are to blame. You denied Him, you betrayed Him, your sin built the cross and your sin nailed Him to it, I want to make your guilt clear. This one's on you. We can talk about specifics, if you want: your greed and envy; your quick trigger these days, your lack of any and all patience; the smiley face you can put on for the world while making your family put up with a bear at home, pick a sin, we can talk about it. We can maybe even confess it, and repent it,

and seek—one more time, like a broken record—we can seek God’s help in changing. The point is, I am determined to make it clear, His blood *is* on us, you and me both, we are the guilty ones. His blood is on us, you and me, and that means; we are the forgiven ones. We are the redeemed ones, bought back with His life blood as the price. We are the ones, washed covered cleansed no debt to pay, a fresh start today and a Kingdom in heaven to look forward to, I am determined to bring His blood on you too. Because it’s the only way to be forgiven; and it’s the only way to be saved.

Come back next week, and we’ll do it again—we’ll cover ourselves with the blood of Jesus one more time. And meantime, may the blood of the Lord be upon all those who were there in Jerusalem 2000 years ago; may His blood be upon all those who have ever called out His name. May His blood be upon us now—convicting us, cleansing us; forgiving us and setting us free; saving us, unto life everlasting.

In the name of Jesus Christ, AMEN.