

# SECOND PRESBYTERIAN

Roanoke, Virginia

All Saints Sunday, November 1, 2020

## *“Forward Remembering”*

*Part VII of the Sermon Series, “Catching Up With the Spirit.”*

*Acts 2:22-36*

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We are in the middle of a sermon series on the Book of Acts and, so far, we have been sequential. Each Sunday, we’ve looked at a passage that comes after the previous Sunday’s passage so as to keep up with the Spirit and maintain a narrative thread.

But today, on All Saints Sunday when we look back to remember loved ones we have lost this past year, I am looking back to chapter 2 in the Book of Acts. I am going back to a sermon when Peter looks back to the past to speak to a new future.

I will not read all of Peter’s sermon. I am skipping over the first part where Peter is speaking to a confused crowd. The crowd is largely made up of Jewish pilgrims who have come from other nations to celebrate in Jerusalem the Jewish holiday of Pentecost. Peter has some explaining to do because the disciples had created a stir that has drawn attention to themselves and gathered the crowd. They had been speaking in tongues. Yesterday they were timid. Today, it was as if a wind had blown them in the streets and a fire was lit in their bellies because with conviction and overwhelming enthusiasm, they are talking to everyone who will listen.

Today, we think of speaking in tongues as ecstatic utterances that make no sense. I have been to Pentecostal worship services and their speaking in tongues sound to me like non-sensical babbling—more emotional vocalizing than actual communication. I don’t criticize it for it can be a powerful mode of prayer. But if you read Acts 2 carefully, that is not what happens here. People who speak other languages *can understand* what the Apostles are saying. They don’t need translation, they need interpretation as in, *“What in the world are they talking about?”* because these disciples are going on and on about a dead man being alive *and* being present with them *as a Spirit*.



Interpretation is what Peter offers. Listen to a portion of his sermon based on Psalm 15 and do so as you are always asked to do when listening to a sermon here at Second Presbyterian: Listen for the Word of God.

<sup>22</sup> “You that are Israelites, listen to what I have to say: Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with deeds of power, wonders, and signs that God did through him among you, as you yourselves know— <sup>23</sup> this man, handed over to you according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of those outside the law. <sup>24</sup> But God raised him up, having freed him from death, because it was impossible for him to be held in its power. <sup>25</sup> For David says concerning him,

‘I saw the Lord always before me,  
for he is at my right hand so that I will not be shaken;  
<sup>26</sup> therefore my heart was glad, and my tongue rejoiced;  
moreover my flesh will live in hope.  
<sup>27</sup> For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One experience corruption.  
<sup>28</sup> You have made known to me the ways of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence.’

<sup>29</sup> “Fellow Israelites, I may say to you confidently of our ancestor David that he both died and was buried, and his tomb is with us to this day. <sup>30</sup> Since he was a prophet, he knew that God had sworn with an oath to him that he would put one of his descendants on his throne. <sup>31</sup> Foreseeing this, David spoke of the resurrection of the Messiah, saying,

‘He was not abandoned to Hades,  
nor did his flesh experience corruption.’

<sup>32</sup> This Jesus God raised up, and of that all of us are witnesses. <sup>33</sup> Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you both see and hear. <sup>34</sup> For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

‘The Lord said to my Lord,  
“Sit at my right hand,  
<sup>35</sup> until I make your enemies your footstool.”’

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

The Word of the Lord! (*Thanks be to God!*)

I want to assure you that *I am not drunk!*



I am glad to say that I have never actually had to begin a sermon with those words, but this is just the way Peter begins his sermon. You didn't hear it because I picked up in the middle, but he opened his sermon by saying, "It is not as you think. We are not drunk. It is only 9:00 in the morning after all."

The disciples are not drunk, they are overjoyed. They are convinced of a hard-to-believe-truth. They are absolutely convinced that Jesus who was crucified and then raised (that was yesterday's hard-to-believe-truth)—that Jesus who was crucified and then raised kept his promise and has returned again... only in Spirit.

That may not be the best way to say it. These days, when we say, "I'll be with you in spirit," we don't mean that we literally will be there. It is our way of saying something like,

- "I'll be thinking about you," or
- "I'll be praying for you," or
- "If I could be there, I'd jump right in there with you."

That's not it. These disciples, all at the same time, have this conviction that Jesus is literally there with them... not physically, but truly present with them. They have this conviction that resurrected life—a life that absorbed death and was not defeated by it—is with them.

That is why Peter has to explain that they are not drunk. He explains that **Death**, and its frequent companion, **Sin**, try to seal the past, but God has opened up a future that those two cannot stop. And to explain this future, Peter looks back.

He starts with Jesus. The people in the crowd already know a lot about Jesus. They know the stories of his sermons, lessons and how he healed others. Peter doesn't introduce Jesus but interprets him as a man *with integrity* who was killed when he didn't deserve it. You have integrity when your words and actions are in keeping with your true self. Well, Jesus' teaching, preaching and healing were completely in keeping with his true self... and in keeping with God's true self. That's the important point. When Jesus was alive, those who knew him came to better know God.

That Jesus had "divine integrity" is what made his execution especially horrible. Respectable and law-abiding people like the Jews who have come to Jerusalem for Pentecost used lawless people to disparage Jesus' reputation in order to eliminate him. The crowd, Herod and Pilate—they all knew Jesus was innocent, but they carried out a character attack anyway to eliminate Jesus and preserve their own power. Shameful!

Only, God's integrity held true even though his son was crucified. God is love, and God stays true to God's true self. God's kind of selfless love *doesn't stop loving*. God raised Jesus from the dead not for revenge but to show that his love breaks the power of sin and death. *The greatest miracle is not that Jesus was raised from the dead, but that he was raised to save those who do not deserve to be saved.*

To press that point home, Peter goes even further back in the past. He goes back to King David. It is hard to understand what Peter is saying when you read the passage cold but what I hear Peter saying about David is beautiful. He says that David saw Jesus.

Here is what he meant by that. Peter believes that when David says in Psalm 15, "I have seen the Lord when he did not abandon me to Hell," he has a vision of Jesus. I would not say that



he knows Jesus' name because Jesus is yet to be born. But David, knows he deserves condemnation for some very real wrongs he committed—I won't get into what he did now, but it involved an affair, a murder and a coverup. When David, knowing that he deserves eternal punishment instead received God's forgiveness, he sees Jesus. He sees Jesus because Jesus is God-Working-Reconciliation. Jesus is God's love reclaiming sinners back to God. And another King will come, and it will be through him that all will be made right.

Jesus, Peter is saying, is that Reconciling Spirit moving right now through the disciples. These disciples, who abandoned Jesus at the cross, saw Jesus resurrected, received his forgiveness, were promised that Jesus would return, and now are ecstatic because they have experienced that promise kept. Jesus is with them again and they are compelled to share him with others.

I didn't read the end of the sermon either, but Peter ends his sermon by calling on those who are listening to repent and be baptized. Stop living in fear of death but live as those who know of life after death. And that means, stop participating in the world's corruptions but live as those who trust the power of God's love to defeat those corruptions. Live for what is graceful and just because in the end the powers of this world have no final power over grace and justice. Live as if your eternal future is with God, not with what you are told power and money can get you.

If I could summarize Peter's sermon it would be to say that he is remembering forward. He remembers David who sees a future for himself because he is forgiven. He remembers Jesus who died, but whose sermons, teachings and works of kindness mean all the more for the future because the one who said and did them is raised and living among them.

It is important how we remember. Some remember as if they are PR reps. They hide or justify wrongs and they make up or over magnify virtues. They do what King Herod and Governor Pilate did and had statues built in their image and their supposed accomplishments carved in stone. Their two aims—both doomed to defeat—is to set in stone whatever suits them right now, and to create a mythology that will hopefully last forever in memory. But, as we all know, memories fade, statues can come down, history is re-written, and today's "Forever Narratives" replace previous "Forever Narratives."

Peter remembers in a different way. He remembers flaws, and the future he describes is not defined by human promises but by God's grace. He can be honest in his remembering because God has eyes that see the truth about us anyway and has a heart that loves us anyway. There are things to fear in this world, but Peter actually suggests that we need not fear death. For at death, all lies and silliness and power games end. Our wanna-be-truths evaporate. There will only remain God. There will only remain God's love.

That truly is Gospel News. That truly is good news because our eternal future has nothing to do with us and everything to do with God. So, let's be honest and true about our faults and failings and trust God to be honest and stay true to God's promise to love us... forever. Amen.

