

Preaching from St. Stephen's Pulpit

St. Stephen Lutheran Church, Williamsburg, VA

April 27, 2025

Everydayness

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Beloved by God, my siblings in Christ, grace to you and peace from God our Creator and our Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

This morning, I want to draw your attention to our reading from the book of Acts. Maybe it's just me, but after numerous sermons on doubting Thomas, I was ready this year to preach on something else. After Easter, we forego our usual readings from the Hebrew Bible in lieu of readings from the Book of Acts, readings which cover the work of the apostles and the early church.

In our reading from Acts 5, Peter and the other apostles have been performing “many signs and wonders among the people.”¹ And as a result, the high priest and all his associates (who were Sadducees) were “filled with jealousy.”² And, as people in power who feel threatened often do, they responded with violence, throwing the apostles in prison.

An angel rescues them,³ but rather than leave, they stick around and continue preaching and teaching at the angel's orders. This brings us to our reading today, in which Peter boldly claims, “We must obey God rather than any human authority.”⁴ Peter follows this up with a summary of Jesus Christ's death and resurrection, as though that somehow explains his radical statement.

¹ Acts 5:12 (NRSVUE)

² Acts 5:17 (NRSVUE)

³ Acts 5:19 (NRSVUE)

⁴ Acts 5:29 (NRSVUE)

And it is a radical statement! “We must obey God rather than any human authority.” Radical! Also dangerous! Such language has been used to justify horrendous things in human history, especially in our settler-colonial history. Religion has been used as an excuse to ignore laws and commit injustices far too often in our history! Of course, our laws are unjust at times, too. Slavery was legal once (through private prisons it largely still is today), oppression of black and brown people, and women, is still baked into all sorts of our systems today.

Peter is defying the laws and authority of his time. But why? Is he trying to institute new systems of power? A new hierarchy with himself at the top? No, he’s defying these powers because he is following the Way of Christ. That’s why he follows up with this quick and dirty summary of Jesus’ life. He’s defying the unjust powers that threw him in prison because he is walking a new Way. He is living a new Way. He is trying to be who God created him to be. And all of that puts him in conflict with the powers-that-be.

It's quite a testimony to the impact Jesus had on Peter and the others. They are ready and willing to be arrested, beaten, and even killed for their desire to share the Gospel good news of God’s love for all. They are willing to risk anything to share with the world that God’s love and grace have defeated death.

This doesn’t happen because someone has been logically convinced to follow the Way. No, this sort of dedication only occurs when someone’s entire life has been reoriented. This willingness to even die to share the Gospel is grounded in a totally new way of living and being. A new Way, a new narrative that affects every aspect of our lives. A new narrative that shows us the Way, a narrative that seeks God in the everyday, in everyone.

When confronted with the immensity of the powers-that-be, powers all too willing to throw the innocent into jail (or an El Salvadoran prison), the

apostles offer an alternative. They share a different way with different values. Authority is derived from service to others, and the greatest are those who sacrifice the most for the sake of their neighbors.

This walking the Way in everyday life is discipleship. Offering an alternative narrative to violence and power is a big part of following the Way of Christ. In her work *Womanist Ethics and the Cultural Production of Evil*, Dr. Emilie M. Townes argues that we move towards a life that takes seriously “everydayness.” This is our best tool in the fight against what she terms the “fantastic hegemonic imagination.” In a litany of actions, she shows us that we have an opportunity to meet the moment each day of our lives:

“the everydayness of listening closely when folks talk or don’t talk to hear what they are saying

the everydayness of taking some time, however short or long, to refresh ourselves through prayer or meditation

the everydayness of speaking to folks and actually meaning whatever it is that is coming out of our mouths

the everydayness of being a presence in people’s lives

the everydayness of designing a class session or lecture or reading or writing or thinking

the everydayness of sharing a meal

the everydayness of facing heartache and disappointment

the everydayness of joy and laughter

the everydayness of facing people who expect us to lead them somewhere or at least point them in the right direction and walk with them

the everydayness of blending head and heart

it’s the everydayness of getting up and trying one more time to get our living right

it is in this everydayness that ‘we the people’ are formed”

The powerfully amazing thing in my mind, is that Christ did all of these everyday actions and more. Christ took time to pray, he preached and taught, he met people where they were at, he ate with people, he laughed and cried. He wasn't just a community leader; he was also a community member.

Jesus showed Peter and the others what it looks like to walk the Way in everyday life. He invites us to walk the Way too. Sure, it will likely put us in opposition to great powers at times, but it is the Way of life and the Way of love, and once we've started on it, we quickly realize that it is the only real Way to live! Amen.