

WEEKLY DEVOTION – Tuesday, April 13, 2021
Pastor Bruce Kischnick, Grace Lutheran Church, New Albany, IN

“THEY DON’T BELONG HERE”

READING: Acts 5:27-33 – Having brought the apostles, they made them appear before the Sanhedrin to be questioned by the high priest. “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.” Peter and the other apostles replied: “We must obey God rather than men! The God of our fathers raised Jesus from the dead – whom you had killed by hanging him on a tree. God exalted him to his own right hand as Prince and Savior that he might give repentance and forgiveness of sins to Israel. We are witnesses of these things, and so is the Holy Spirit, whom God has given to those who obey him.” When they heard this, they were furious and wanted to put them to death.

Two weeks ago Becky and I took a little vacation to the north country in Wisconsin to visit our eldest son and his family. As we were coming home on the Tuesday of Holy Week, we could see more and more greenery the further south we drove. But as we were going past Scottsburg, I noticed a little Bradford pear tree all in bloom. I made mention of it to Becky because it was the first flowering shrub either of us had seen this spring. From there on south we saw white blossoms everywhere: in the woods, in the subdivisions, along the side of the road, in fence rows, and along the creek banks. Everywhere we looked we saw Bradford pears in bloom, a sure sign of spring, and a sure sign of trouble.

You see, Bradford pear trees, when they were introduced, were said to be sterile. The developers claimed that because the trees were hybrids, they would not be able to reproduce. They were widely planted in subdivisions and on campuses of various kinds all through 1990’s and into the 2000’s. But as the movie “Jurassic Park” famously put it, “Nature finds a way.” Or, as the ad for a kind of margarine once put it, “It’s not nice to fool Mother Nature!” Bradford pears found a way, all right. And as they blossomed this spring, you could see the extent to which they have been successful to the point of being a nuisance and considered an invasive species. They don’t belong in those places, and biologists and foresters are worried that they’ll crowd out more native and traditional trees.

In our text for today St. Luke records the confrontation between the Apostles of the Lord and the Sanhedrin, the same Council that condemned Jesus to death and delivered him over to Pontus Pilate for crucifixion. This is the time shortly after Pentecost, and fueled and fired by the Holy Spirit, the Apostles have been boldly and quite publicly preaching the Good News of salvation in Jesus Christ. They proclaim his death at the hands of the leaders of Judah and his Resurrection on Easter. They do this with the slightest hesitation, even though they had been arrested by the chief priests and sternly warned not to preach, teach, or do miracles in His name. The Sanhedrin and the High Priest have reason to be alarmed for the Church is growing leaps and bounds. More and more people are putting their trust in the blood of Jesus. To the leaders of Judaism, these people don’t belong here in the Holy City. These

people are like an invasive species that proliferates and propagates itself, threatening to overwhelm to local environment. Something has to be done! These “Followers of the Way”, as they call themselves, do not belong in Judaism, nor in Jerusalem, nor anywhere they may turn up.

As the text indicates, they were furious enough to think about executing all the Apostles as they had done their Rabbi, but a wise and influential teacher of the Law, Gamaliel, advises them not to pursue such a rash and dangerous plan. He tells them that if this Jesus cult is just a passing fad, it will fade away like so many others had done. And, if this really was from God, they would not be able to stop it and would find themselves fighting against God. So they flog the Apostles and order them to cease and desist. And, guess what? The Apostles leave the prison *“rejoicing because they had been counted worthy of suffering disgrace for the Name”!*

The fact is that the Church WAS an act of God as was the Passion, the Crucifixion, and the Resurrection. Nothing that His enemies could do would stop the Church from growing and spreading and becoming strong – not plots, not floggings, not imprisonment, not persecutions, not martyrdom, not the Roman emperors nor the Coliseum with its lions and flames. Jesus rose on Easter, the Disciples were eyewitnesses of this, and after Pentecost these men were undeterred by threat and violence. Jesus lives! And the Church will continue to gather in His elect whether the world thinks they belong here or not.

In this season of Easter how wonderful it is to be renewed in our joy over Jesus and our calling to be his disciples, too. It’s been a long year, with many trials and uncertainties. But Easter reminds us why we are Christians: God paid the debt we owed him by sacrificing his one and only perfect Son, and then He raised Jesus up on the third day so we might know beyond the shadow of a doubt that because He lives, we shall live also. We *don’t* belong here. They’re right! We belong home in heaven, and Jesus makes it our home. Amen.

PRAYER:

ANNOUNCEMENT(S):

1) PASTORS CLASS: began this past Sunday, and it will meet on Sundays, 1:00-3:00 P.M. as we talk about the Christian basics from a Lutheran perspective. It’s not too late to join us and refresh your knowledge once again.

2) THANK YOU: to Helen Bohannon, the keyboardists, the Chapel Strings, the Choir, and soloists for blessing us with marvelous music to enhance our worship during Holy Week and especially Easter. I also want to make a shout-out to Kenny Morris for the Tomb he made for us two years ago. As I looked at it again this year, I did so with renewed appreciation for his vision and his talent. THANKS, KENNY!