

## “The Promise”

[The video, “His Resurrection Today” was shown.]

In our Scripture Reading from the Book of Acts, Luke, the Evangelist, reported the concluding portion of the Apostle Peter’s Pentecost Sermon. The eldest Disciple presented that sermon because he and the other Original Disciples received the Gift of the Holy Spirit on that Pentecost and they manifested it by praising God and the Divine Parent’s Deeds through many different languages, which they did not normally speak. That scene drew the attention of thousands of people.

Peter’s Sermon declared that Jesus was the Crucified and Risen Messiah. He also reminded them of the role their religious leaders had played in bringing about his death – the Messiah’s death! Both of those facts – the Crucifixion and the Resurrection of Jesus were proved by his Disciples receiving the miraculous abilities of the Holy Spirit – those truths led the crowd to recognize and believe Peter was correct about Jesus being God’s Messiah. That realization by the people led them to respond with a feeling of guilt and confusion.

Even today, many folks in local churches and non-churched people are bewildered about the purpose and meaning of Jesus’ Resurrection. The video we watched a few moments ago, reminds us about some important aspects of the meaning of Jesus’ Resurrection. Indeed, as reported by the video, his resurrection reveals “that God’s unfailing love for you is never ending”, “you can come into His presence without fear”, “that you are a new creation in Christ”, “you are FREE from the law of sin and death”, “that hope is alive in this world for you”, and “you can connect to God. Anytime. Anywhere.” The creator of the video also remind us that the Apostle Peter wrote in **1 Peter 1:3-5**, ***“By His boundless mercy He has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade.”*** And so, the video joins us in declaring about Jesus, “He is risen from the dead! Christ is risen! Hallelujah!”

Perhaps, if Peter had communicated some of the same type of statements shown in the video in his sermon, the crowd would have been less apprehensive. However, understandably, the Apostle was both angry about the execution of Jesus and a bit vindictive toward the Jewish authorities. The large number of persons, who were present, obviously picked up on Peter’s emotions and unhappiness. **Luke explained the scene in verse 37 of our Reading, “When the people heard this, they were deeply troubled and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘What shall we do, brothers?’”**

The oldest Disciple of Jesus responded to the people’s concerns and their desire for a positive resolution of their status in **verse 38a when “Peter said to them, ‘Each one of you must turn away from your sins and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ’”**. Now, the translation of many other versions of that verse use the English word “repent” for turning away from one’s sins. However, I believe our Good News’ translation more accurately conveys the meaning of what Peter said. “Turning away from” our sins is a matter of discontinuing our self-destructive ways of life, which cause alienation between ourselves, God, and others. Unfortunately, many

brothers and sisters in Christ have adopted the mistaken belief the list of sins from the Jewish Law defines which sins we must turn away from. Then, the temptation to judge others comes into the mix and it becomes very easy to self-righteously denounce others, who disagree with the Jewish Law's list and continue to practice some of the supposed "sins". It is also unfortunate, public perception tends to believe those self-righteous denunciations by some religious folks is the sole view of Christians.

Here at Round Grove United Church, United Church of Christ, we have adopted the God Is Still Speaking emphasis, which celebrates our Divine Parent's Radical and Extravagant Hospitality, Invitation, and Welcome – God's Agape Love, Forgiveness, Healing, Reconciliation, and New Life. The following video deals with the struggle of remorse and guilt, which the Pentecost crowd was experiencing, as well as, what is felt by people today, who have undergone rejection and abuse at the hands of the self-righteous, or who expect such treatment, if they seek to participate in a local church. The Good News message in the following video is very much in line with our God Is Still Speaking Emphasis of everyone being welcomed in God's Love and Community. [The video, "God Says Be Mine" was shown.]

The video we just viewed reflected some of the same kind of remorse the people exhibited on Pentecost following Peter's message. If you or someone you know expresses beliefs, such as, "I'm no good to anybody. I've let people down." Or "I've made mistakes." Or "I'm clumsy, untalented, ignorant. I'm worthless.", then remember and share "God says, BE MINE." No matter how inferior someone feels about her or his self, it is comforting our Divine Parent knows where we have been and what we have done and still God invites and welcomes everyone – even those, who are the most rejected by society! It is liberating to know we can turn everything about our history and selves over to God's Agape Love and the Almighty will take it and transform our lives!

Peter finally moved on to the positive transformation and New Life the Pentecost gathering needed, as he continued in **verses 38b and 39**, "***so that your sins will be forgiven; and you will receive God's gift, the Holy Spirit. For God's promise was made to you and your children, and to all who are far away — all whom the Lord our God calls to Himself.***" Examining closely what Peter told them, he affirmed God forgives everyone who believes – he verbalized it with his talk of turning from sin and showing one's belief by being baptized. He indicated the promise of the New Faith Relationship with our Divine Parent and New Life in Christ, including Eternal Life after this earthly life, is not limited to the Jews but also to their children and to "all who are far away – all whom the Lord our God calls to Himself." Friends, that includes all of us! Joining in this Worship Celebration demonstrates we are called by God! When someone, who has either been rejected or is afraid of being rejected, joins in our Worship Celebrations, she or he has also manifested he or she is called by God! Further, Peter shared God gives us the Gift of the Holy Spirit – God's and Jesus Christ's continual presence and empowerment for New Life! So, let's not despair – we are heirs of God's Promise – our Divine Parent Radically and Extravagantly Loves, Invites, Forgives, and Welcomes us. Let us be about sharing this Good, Great, and Wonderful News with everyone, who needs it. And let us be agents of God's Radical and Extravagant Hospitality! Amen.