

Grace, mercy and peace to you, from God our Father, and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. This morning is Good Shepherd Sunday. A fitting celebration as we behold the confession of confirmed faith in these young people this morning. They will confirm their faith in the Good Shepherd who leads them, and is with them as they make confession with their lives in the scandal of the Cross.

The cross is a scandal you ask? Yes. And you, our young people confess your faith in this scandalous cross with your lives. And the Good Shepherd stands by you.

The Fourth Sunday of Easter is appointed to be Good Shepherd Sunday. Our readings, our hymns, our service, meditate and reflect on Jesus, the Good Shepherd.

Easter was three Sundays ago. We continue in the Easter season and meditate on Jesus' resurrection. Christ is risen! and so are we. We live with these young people confirmed in the faith, serving, and confessing the scandal of the Cross.

You see the Cross is scandalous because of its message. What is the Cross' message? Peter says in our reading from Acts, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved." We put our faith in Jesus alone. There is no room on the altar of our hearts for anything else. God is a jealous God who does not want to share us with anything. Not money, nor fame, nor fortune. It is a scandalous claim to say that in Jesus alone we are saved. Not in Buddha, or Gannesh, or Thor, nor Allah. Jesus alone saves.

Our rotation of readings has some different readings during this Easter time. It is during Easter that the First of the readings you hear come from the book of the Acts of the Apostles, or rather just the book of Acts.

The book of Acts documents the life of the early church. The gospels finish with Jesus' resurrection. The gospels tell us of Jesus' birth and life and teachings. They climax with Jesus' crucifixion, death, and resurrection. They conclude shortly afterwards. The book of Acts picks up after this, and shows to us how Jesus' followers, the apostles and disciples, how God uses them to grow His church. Jesus' disciples are God's instruments for spreading the gospel to the Jews and the rest of the world.

The book of Acts begins with Jesus' ascension into heaven, which is witnessed by Jesus' disciples and angels. The angels assure the disciples of Jesus' return, that he will come back by the same way that He had left them that is from above.

Well, the disciples start to organize themselves and the church. They formalize as a group, figuring out who does what in their assembly, in their congregation.

Afterwards, God fulfills His promise to clothe the disciples with power from on high. Pentecost happens. The Holy Spirit comes upon the church, filling hearts with God, setting hearts ablaze. There is quite a crowd at this occasion, to which Peter speaks, and gives his famed Pentecost sermon, and the Holy Spirit converts 3,000.

It is not too long afterwards that Peter and John were at the temple, at the time of prayer. A lame man at the temple begs for money. He is crippled since birth, and his livelihood is begging for money. Peter answers the man, "Look at us!"⁵ So the man gave them his attention, expecting to get something from them.⁶ Then Peter said, "Silver or gold I do not have, but what I have I give you. In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, walk."⁷ Taking him by the right hand, he helped him up, and instantly the man's feet and ankles became strong.⁸ He jumped to his feet and began to walk. Then he went with them into the temple courts, walking and jumping, and praising God.

Peter testifies to the onlookers. These witnesses knew of the events with Jesus and Pentecost. And they now behold this crippled man made well.

It is Peter's privilege to testify, to witness. He proclaims Jesus. Peter shows the crowd at the temple that all the prophets have pointed to Jesus as the Christ. He knows the crowd knows and is familiar with Moses and the prophets. It is Peter's privilege to show that Moses and the prophets point to Jesus, and Him crucified.

And remember to whom Peter testifies, men of Israel. They are those responsible for the death of the one who is to come, the one who will crush the serpent's head. Peter reminds them, "You handed him over to be killed, and you disowned him before Pilate, though he had decided to let him go." ¹⁴ You disowned the Holy and Righteous One and asked that a murderer be released to you." Peter gives great testimony at the temple.

Well, our first reading is the reaction from the Jews who hear Peter's testimony, and who then bring Peter and John to jail for holding that night and bring them before Caiaphas, and the other ruling Jews. If the names sound familiar, they should. These are those responsible for Jesus's crucifixion and death. Peter is preaching to them.

And oh, so scandalous is Peter's claim, "Salvation is found in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given to men by which we must be saved."

A claim like this is scandalous to a world that says that there are many ways to the hereafter. The world and the devil deceive many, that there are multiple paths to the same destination.

The Good Shepherd tells us that we are not alone and are to follow Him as we live as his forgiven servants.

It takes much humbling to serve, to believe. In fact it is only by the power of the Holy Spirit that we believe, that we have faith. It takes the power of God to break down the walls of unbelief and plant faith. Cody, our Lord tells you, in your confirmation verse, "Whoever humbles himself is exalted." You and Olivia and Carson, have humbled yourselves, you have admitted that, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ my Lord, or believe in Him." The Holy Spirit calls you to believe.

Olivia, you have great commitment from our Lord in your confirmation verse, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go." Such a wonderful promise as you live and serve under the care of the Good Shepherd.

Jesus holds you Carson. Your verse, "I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand." Jesus has you in His arms and gentle care. In valley and over hill, Jesus watches over you as you belong to Him.

Jesus gives such wonderful promises. Jesus is the Good Shepherd and He confirms that He walks with you where ever you go, and nothing will take you from His mighty hands. In the name of Jesus. Amen.