

Sermon – May 22, 2022 - Easter 6

The Easter Effect - KNOW, PRAY, TELL

Acts 16:9–15

Grace and peace from our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

Have you ever wondered about the effects of Faith in us?

We know of cause and effect, but how can we identify the cause and the effect?

The cause is Christ, his life, his passion, his death, and his and in this season, we talk about his resurrection. And the effect? We have life, we have heaven, the New Jerusalem, the New World, we heard about last Sunday. But there is more, while on this side of eternity there are some signs or effects that we can see. Signs and effects that we see springing up just after Jesus' resurrection, as we see happening in the book of Acts this morning. Those effects and signs might help us to grow more in our faith as we discover how we have been affected ourselves.

We usually look for signs don't we. Signs, signs, everywhere signs. "No shirt, no shoes, no service." "Don't walk on the grass." "Do not disturb." There are signs we dislike: "Speed Limit 60," "Limit One Per Customer," "Limited Time Only." We dislike them because they limit us. We want life to be without bounds, free, so we dislike signs that limit us.

And then there are signs we long to see. For example, if we or a loved one is sick, we desperately look for a sign of improvement—a sign that things are going to get better. People look for signs in their relationships. "Does she love me? Should I get more serious in this relationship?" Those of you looking for work; you're looking for a sign too, aren't you? You're looking for direction. You are looking for hope.

And what about the signs in our church? For example, how do you know it's Easter? What are the signs? There's the aroma of Easter lilies and Easter breakfast. The cries of, "He is risen! He is risen indeed!" and so on, we even have a full church then, but then Easter goes by. How do you know? The aroma and sound of Easter are no more. Attendance drops. Life returns to that seemingly unending rut.

Now, is that all there is? Are we really thinking the effect of Easter has come and gone? Not so today. God's Word is filled with Easter signs, and today we see them in

a woman named Lydia. This morning we examine a bit the effect of the power of Christ's resurrection caused in here, and what signs we can look for.

Let's meet Lydia. We read: "And on the Sabbath day we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we supposed there was a place of prayer, and we sat down and spoke to the women who had come together. ¹⁴One who heard us was a woman named Lydia, from the city of Thyatira, a seller of purple goods..." (vs 13–14).

What do we learn here? We get a couple of signs that tell us about this woman, Lydia. We learn that Lydia was from the city of Thyatira. This small city in Asia Minor was a commercial center, especially known for its rich crops and its production of purple dye. Logically enough, then, Lydia was a dealer in purple cloth. Purple cloth was costly and purchased primarily by the nobility. These signs tell us that Lydia was probably a businesswoman of some wealth. She was a well to do person. But those things are not signs of the resurrection.

The text also says that Lydia was "a worshiper of God" (v 14). "Worshiper of God" is a term that was often used as a sign for Gentiles who believed in the Jewish God, Yahweh. However, although they believed in God, they were not yet believers in Christ. Is this a sign of Easter? No, but we're getting closer. She was hangry for knowing more about God. One of the effects of Easter, is to know more about Jesus, and not just to know about Jesus, and about God, or about his Word, but to know Jesus, to know his word.

Let's continue. The text says: "The Lord opened her heart to pay attention to what was said by Paul" (v 14). We don't know what Paul said, but he certainly shared the message of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. It would include what we confess in the Creed. It would be a message that Jesus had died on the cross for her and of the victory of Easter and life for all who believe. And through God's divine work, she paid attention! She heard! Her heart was opened!

But that's not all! Notice she didn't waste any time getting baptized along with the members of her household. It was surely a sign. In Lydia's Baptism, she was united in Christ's death and resurrection (Rom 6:3–5). Faith was there. Salvation was hers. Trust in the Savior was there, and I'm sure a desire to pray increased, and probably followed the disciple's example of prayer. Actually, that's what the disciples

were going to do at that time, for they were told that there was a place of prayer nearby. As you see, another sign or effect Jesus causes in us is the desire to pray, to converse with God in prayer.

But it didn't stop there. Faith produced fruit. She begged Paul to allow her to host the missionaries in her home: "If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay" (v 15). And the text says, "She prevailed upon us." Her new faith simply wouldn't allow her not to express it in works of kindness. Later we even see Paul returning to stay with Lydia—obviously an active member of the church.

What we see in Lydia is just how powerful the message of Easter is— it brings life and salvation! We see the signs! We see an open heart that hears the Word and receives the gifts from Word and Baptism to create faith. Then we see evidence of that faith in good works—the hospitality she offers to Paul and his companions. In her example and the example of the disciples, we see that one of the effects of Easter, is to know, to pray and to tell.

God calls. God opens hearts. God creates faith, and God empowers for service. These are the bigger signs of Easter, and these marks are the work of the Holy Spirit as we confess in the catechism: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith" (explanation of the Second Article).

Lydia was a miracle of God's wondrous love indeed, and a positive proof that the effects of Easter linger on. But let's not stop with Lydia. You, too, are a sign, a sign of life, a sign that Easter goes on living, living in hearts and voices. A sign that Jesus is our savior and Lord.

Although, some of you right now, don't feel much of a sign, haven't seen the effects of Easter in your lives, or feeling as if the effects of Easter have left you long ago. Maybe feeling that the effects of your baptism have left you all together.

First, know that this would be the work of the devil himself. He aims to steal your victory and lead you to despair. If possible, his goal is to turn your eyes from the empty tomb and turn them inward to yourself and your worldly desires. His goal is to drive you away from Jesus by telling you that Jesus might not be as we were taught in Sunday

School after all. Maybe what others have said, is true, that Jesus is just a mythological figure that people have constructed to cope with life issues. For all those things we might conclude that the effects of the resurrections, and of our faith, with all its signs are not there anymore.

Is it any wonder that the Church often grows quiet and lifeless nearly forty days after the resurrection? Let it not be so!

Thanks be to God! He is patient and merciful. Christ died and rose for you! God prepares hearts through Confession and Absolution. Forgiveness is received. Hearts are made ready for the proclamation of God's Word, and the Holy Spirit works in this Word to build faith. It happens each and every Sunday despite Satan's attempt to mislead and distract us. But still God works—in other means too—in Baptism and the Holy Supper. Like Lydia, our hearts are opened, and through the power of the Spirit, faith is strengthened and are excited at sharing the God's love through the Gospel proclamation with others. So, we know, we pray, and we tell.

And then, too, as with Lydia, faith produces fruit: hands that serve, voices that proclaim, arms that comfort and provide, and legs that take us where we need to be. The Gospel of Christ crucified and risen has this effect. The victory of the empty grave lives on and on.

Clearly, there is no way to silence the effect of Easter. It goes on because Jesus lives, and because he lives, we live also. Jesus lives, and, as he lives, it is still appropriate to say: He is risen! He is risen indeed! Amen.