

**Acts 18:1-11 + Peace for the Fearful + Series: Jesus Lives! So What?**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 2nd Sunday of Easter + 8 April 2018**

**CIR HIRI!**<sup>1</sup>

Have you moved on? Just a week ago, we gathered here to celebrate the greatest victory in human history. It took two worship services to contain our Easter Sunday celebrations. After forty days without an “alleluia,” we sang or spoke over 120. We gladly repeated the ancient Paschal Greeting: **CIR HIRI!** We turned to the Lord who lives and found peace for the broken. We celebrated what Christ accomplished, is accomplishing, and will accomplish for us. We rejoiced in our living Savior’s Easter victory. That was a week ago.

...But have you moved on? Is Easter now in your rearview mirror as you start focusing on the rest of the spring and what’s ahead this summer? Were you ready to move on once we sang the last Alleluia last Sunday? Our world moves on pretty quickly from holiday to holiday—and often we do too.

...But do we really need to keep celebrating? Jesus lives! We know that. We heard plenty about it last week, but so what? Why keep on celebrating? Why bask in the afterglow of Easter not just this week or today, but every day?

Starting today, our Lord gives us the opportunity to understand why “Jesus lives” still matters. That’s the beauty of the church season of Easter—the Great 50 Days, as it is called. During these Easter weeks, we have the opportunity to keep celebrating the victory Christ won for us on Easter long after the church no longer smells like Easter lilies and the candy is gone. To do that, we’re going to spend time with the apostles as the Lord plants his church through them. “Jesus lives” impacted their lives and ministries, even to the point of death. “Jesus lives” still matters for us today and every day.

In the days leading up to Christ’s death, Peter and the other disciples boldly boasted that they would never abandon Jesus, but later, we find them filled with fear. Peter denies knowing Jesus. The other disciples abandon him in his hour of need. Even today, we heard how they fearfully hid behind locked doors waiting for the mobs to come after them.

Only after God poured out his Holy Spirit on his disciples 50 days after Jesus’ resurrection do we finally see courage. Peter speaks to a crowd of thousands on Pentecost. The disciples boldly confess their faith before the same religious leaders who condemned Jesus. The followers of Jesus confidently spread the gospel and willingly face death for it, but not before Pentecost.

So it’s no surprise if we think of Jesus’ disciples as being foolish or fearful. Yet there was one apostle we’d never consider to be fearful or timid. The Apostle Paul strikes us as a man who was always bold. When the Lord transformed Paul’s heart and mind, he was willing to endure tremendous suffering for the sake of Christ. One time he was dragged out of a city and stoned by a mob. When they left him for dead, he got back up, dusted himself off, and went back into the city. Why? Because he wanted everyone to know Jesus, their living Savior, and his grace.

...But that’s not the Paul we find today. Today we find Paul bruised and battered, weary and worn out, frustrated and even fearful. We find Paul continuing his work of spreading the gospel, but wondering if was going to blow up in his face again as it had in other cities. You see, by the time Paul reached Corinth, he had already faced beatings, flogging, imprisonment, humiliation, a riot, and a city that thought Paul and his message were strange. All of that in the first few weeks Paul did mission work on the European continent.

Paul had traveled throughout Greece to spread the gospel. Just as the gospel was starting to bear fruit in Philippi, he was beaten and thrown into prison with his co-worker Silas for helping a slave girl possessed by a fortune-telling demon. The Lord rescued them and even brought the jailer and his family to faith, but things didn’t get any better in Thessalonica. Opposition to his preaching blew up into a riot that forced him to flee the city. From there he traveled to Athens, but Paul didn’t seem to get anywhere with anyone. Many considered his message to be just another strange philosophical teaching.

So when Paul arrived in Corinth, you wonder what was going through his mind. The mission work had been rocky in most places, yet the Lord had also formed little congregations of believers in those places. Corinth was

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<sup>1</sup> “Christ is risen!” “He is risen indeed!” This is known as the *Paschal Greeting*, one of the oldest and most widespread traditions in the Christian church. Throughout the weeks of the Easter season, whenever the minister says to the people, “Christ is risen!”, they respond loudly and boldly, “He is risen indeed!”

a large, commercial city in southern Greece, but it also had a reputation for immorality that would make Las Vegas and Amsterdam blush. Like anywhere else, they needed the living Savior too.

When Paul arrived, he met a couple of believing tentmakers named Aquila and Priscilla. Having heard the good news that the Messiah had come, they welcome Paul into their home. Paul did his own share of tentmaking with them, but he was still a missionary. First, he went to his countrymen—people who knew the Old Testament as he did, people who spoke the same language and had similar customs, people who were looking for the coming of the Savior as he had. So **“every Sabbath Paul reasoned in the synagogue, trying to persuade both Jews and Greeks.”** He wanted them to see what he had seen, to know what he knew about this Jesus. He wanted them to know that Jesus was their living Savior who had fulfilled all of God’s prophecies. He was so focused on this task that when his co-workers Silas and Timothy arrived in Corinth, Paul stopped making tents and **“devoted himself to preaching the word and testified to the Jews that Jesus was the Messiah.”** Paul wanted people to know their living Savior.

Now many of Paul’s Jewish hearers resisted his teaching, but then they became abusive—slandering Paul, blaspheming his so-called Messiah, and rejecting the gospel. They hardened their hearts and tried to silence Paul with their abuse. He was so furious with their response that **“...he shook out his clothes and told them, ‘Your blood is on your own heads! I am innocent. From now on I will go to the Gentiles.’”** For the sake of the gospel, for the sake of his own soul and the souls of those who did believe, Paul left his countrymen behind. There was nothing easy about that. Paul had to take the gospel to others who would listen, even if they were unbelieving pagans.

Paul went next door to the home of Titius Justus—a Greek **“worshiper of God”** who had been attending the synagogue. In that home, Paul began to teach about Jesus—the Savior who died to bring peace with God and forgiveness for guilt, the Savior who lives to break the chains of sin, the Savior who lives to give sight to those lost in darkness, the Savior who lives to give life that lasts forever. God blessed the work! **“Many of the Corinthians, when they heard, believed and were baptized.”** Even Crispus, the man in charge of the synagogue services, and his entire household believed in Jesus!

The Lord was richly blessing Paul’s work, but the pattern seemed all too familiar. You can forgive Paul if he was starting to feel burned out, worn down, alone, and even afraid after enduring so much. Would he again experience what he had experienced in Philippi or Thessalonica? Would a mob rise up against him? Would angry people get him thrown in jail or run out of town?

You can understand if Paul was starting to get gun shy, if he was starting to wonder about moving on before things got bad again. You can understand if Paul was starting to have doubts about his work and if it was still worth it. Even the greatest apostle grew weary and filled with fear. You wonder if Paul was feeling all of this because Jesus felt it necessary to visit Paul.

Into such doubt, into such weariness, into such hesitation, into such fear came Jesus, the living Lord. He came in a night vision with words full of peace. **“Don’t be afraid...”** Throughout Scripture, the living Savior always used those words to calm the troubled hearts of his fear-filled people. Jesus spoke those words when he appeared to his people in the Old Testament. Jesus spoke them to his disciples during his ministry, and a form of them to his disciples after his resurrection. They are words of peace for fearful hearts.

**“...But keep on speaking and don’t be silent.”** Jesus urged Paul to freely proclaim the gospel without fear. Why? **“For I am with you, and no one will lay a hand on you to hurt you, because I have many people in this city.”** Paul had no need to fear. His living Savior was there with him, protecting him, and blessing him. It wouldn’t be déjà vu all over again as Yogi Berra once said. Paul could settle in there and start bringing in the harvest. With fears silenced, Paul **“stayed there a year and a half, teaching the word of God among them.”**

Are there times when you feel like Paul—when you get worn down, tired of the grind, tired of failure, tired of the struggle, when you get fearful and willing to give up? As confident as we might think we are, fear still lurks in the shadows. So much of life can be a struggle. You struggle with your kids, with your job, with your marriage, with school, with your health, with relationships. Even as a congregation, we struggle. So you wonder sometimes if the struggle is really worth it. When you’re tired, when you’re worn out, when you’re uncertain and hesitant and doubting, that’s when fear starts to creep out of the shadows. Will this fail too? Will this blow up in my face? Will we ever see the fruits of our labors in Christ? Such fears come naturally—whether they’re justified or not. What’s even worse is that Satan and your sinful nature make you think you’re on your own, left alone to cope with all these crushing struggles.

Then into such doubt, into such weariness, into such loneliness, into such hesitation, into such fear comes Jesus, your living Lord, your living Savior. He brings words filled with peace that silences your fears and doubts and loneliness. ***“Don’t be afraid...for I am with you...”***—the same words he used to silence Paul’s fears and the fears of all his disciples.

Behind those words is a guarantee—a guarantee made when Jesus put himself in your place under that crushing burden of life’s struggles; a guarantee made when Jesus took all your doubts and fears and worries and uncertainties and put them on himself on the cross; a guarantee made when Jesus abandoned his tomb on Easter morning. He came out, but all those doubts, all those fears, all those worries, all that loneliness and uncertainty, all that sin and guilt and death stayed in the tomb.

In so doing, Jesus brings peace to your fearful heart. Because Jesus lives, you can get up in the morning and carry out the unique callings God has given you for your Christian life right now. They vary depending on what season of life you happen to be in, but God gives them to you to extend his love to others. Because Jesus lives, you need not live with fear, but instead you carry out the work God has given you—to live his love in every aspect of your life. Because Jesus lives, you can even tell others about their Savior so they know why Jesus lives, confident that his Word works. Because Jesus lives, fear is silenced, doubts dismissed, loneliness filled, and life is ours. **CIR HIRI!** Amen.