

**Acts 3:11-20 + Confidence to Speak + Series: Jesus Lives! So What?**  
**Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 3rd Sunday of Easter + 15 April 2018**

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

It should be easy. The Lord says, **“Preach the good news to all creation.”** (Mark 16:15) **“Always be ready to give the reason for the hope that you have.”** (1 Peter 3:15) You’re talking with a friend. An opportunity to share your faith presents itself. You open your mouth. You share the good news of Jesus—the basic message of sin and grace and why that matters to you. Your friend listens. Perhaps they respond, but the point is, you shared the gospel with someone else. Should be easy, right?

Then why is it when an opportunity presents itself, I avoid the subject or keep my mouth shut? Why is it when an opportunity presents itself, sharing the gospel doesn’t seem so easy? Why is it when an opportunity presents itself, my mind can come up with excuses faster than a child caught with their hand in the cookie jar? “Will the conversation end if I share this message? Will they push back? Will they object? Will they look at me funny? Will they stop talking to me? What if I say something wrong? What if I sound like a fool who has no idea what he’s talking about? Will this blow up in my face? Maybe someone else will tell them about Jesus. Why should I be the one to do it?”

Any of those excuses sound familiar to you? They’re familiar to me because they’re my excuses. Here’s a true confession about something that pastors don’t like to admit. Talking to other people about Jesus, sharing the Word of God both the harsh reality of God’s law and the healing truth of God’s gospel isn’t always easy for me either. Sometimes I’d rather hide than have a tough, yet necessary conversation with someone. Striking up a conversation with a stranger doesn’t come naturally. To a certain extent, that comes from fear.

Last week we talked about being fearful and how Jesus’ victory over death brings peace to our fearful hearts. Sometimes that fear is more focused—not fear broadly looking at the future or the now, but fear focused on speaking about Jesus, sharing what we know from God’s Word through faith in Jesus. Sometimes that fear keeps us from opening our mouths to share the gospel.

Jesus’ disciples even had that problem. In fact, there was a time when even Jesus’ most outspoken disciple had a hard time speaking about Jesus. In a matter of one week, Peter lost all confidence. Peter had been something of a spokesman for Jesus’ disciples. When Jesus asked them, **“Who do you say I am?”**, Peter gave a bold, beautiful answer, **“You are the Christ, the Son of the living God.”** (Matthew 16:15-16) During Jesus’ last week of life, Peter vowed to stand next to his Lord through thick and thin, even if he had to give up his life. He would never deny or disown Jesus, but then Peter’s world turned upside down. Jesus was betrayed by one of his own into the hands of his enemies. Peter tried to defend Jesus, but only ended up blindly cutting off the ear of a servant, which Jesus promptly healed. As Jesus was hauled away to trial, Peter and John followed Jesus at a distance.

Later when Peter was warming himself by a fire that evening in the high priest’s courtyard, where Jesus was on trial, a servant girl called him out. **“You also were with Jesus...”** (Mark 14:67) Peter’s opportunity to speak of Jesus had come, but Peter denied even knowing Jesus. He moved away from the fire and someone confronted him again. Peter’s next opportunity had come, but Peter again denied even knowing Jesus. Fear had taken hold of Peter’s heart. One more time he was confronted and one more time he had an opportunity...and one more time Peter denied knowing Jesus. At that moment, the Lord looked at his fearful disciple and Peter wilted. He ran away silenced by fear and weeping bitterly.

Soon Peter found himself hiding behind locked doors with the rest of Jesus’ disciples. Fear of the mobs kept them there. The disciples had no idea what was coming next. Their Lord was dead. Left to his fear, Peter probably would’ve stopped speaking altogether about Jesus. He had lost all confidence.

...But then Sunday morning came. Reports came in that the tomb was empty and Jesus was alive. The disciples didn’t know what to make of this. So Peter and John ran to the tomb and found it empty, but no Jesus. At some point on that Easter Sunday, Jesus did appear to Peter. Jesus was truly alive...and fear’s vice-like grip started to loosen! Then Jesus appeared to his disciples behind locked doors that evening. He brought peace to their troubled, fear-filled hearts. He showed them the scars in his hands and feet and side and urged the disciples to

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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!”

see that he wasn't a ghost. Fear cracked and crumbled. Jesus even ate some broiled fish in their presence, and fear lost its grip. Then Jesus opened their minds with Scripture. Jesus filled their hearts with confidence as he prepared them to go out with his gospel. Peter found confidence not in his own bravado or ability, but in his living Lord.

Leap ahead a few months and you find Peter and John in the middle of a rapidly growing crowd on the temple mount in Jerusalem. A man clings to Peter and John and won't let go. They're not in trouble. He just won't let them go because that man standing there had never stood or walked before they walked into the temple that day. There Peter and John stand, people running towards them from every direction, a newly healed man clinging to them, and the Lord presents them with a huge opportunity to speak. Peter had healed the man. Would he take the credit? Would he fall back on his own bravado? The people racing towards them needed to know about Jesus and why they needed Jesus. Would Peter confidently take the opportunity that God was presenting to him or would he cave in to fear again and wilt under the pressure?

This time everything was different. This time Peter had seen and heard the risen Jesus. This time Peter wasn't leaning on his own ability or bravery. This time Peter had confidence in the living Christ. Peter addressed the people and didn't hold back. ***"Fellow Israelites, why are you amazed at this? Why do you stare at us, as though we had made him walk by our own power or godliness? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God of our ancestors, has glorified his servant Jesus, whom you handed over and denied before Pilate, though he had decided to release him. You denied the Holy and Righteous One and asked to have a murderer released to you. You killed the source of life, whom God raised from the dead; we are witnesses of this. By faith in his name, his name has made this man strong, whom you see and know. So the faith that comes through Jesus has given him this perfect health in front of all of you."***

Because Jesus lives, Peter confidently spoke in that moment of opportunity that the Lord presented. Because Jesus lives, Peter confidently gave glory to God and not to himself for healing that paralyzed man. Because Jesus lives, Peter confidently spoke hard words and cut people to the heart as he boldly called out the people for condemning Jesus, the Holy One of God and Source of Life. Because Jesus lives, Peter confidently pointed the people to Christ alone. Yes, Jesus was killed, but God raised him from the dead! How could Peter say that? ***"We are witnesses of this."*** Yet Peter wasn't done!

***"And now, brothers and sisters, I know that you acted in ignorance, just as your leaders also did. In this way God fulfilled what he had predicted through all the prophets—that his Messiah would suffer. Therefore repent and turn back, so that your sins may be wiped out, that seasons of refreshing may come from the Lord, and that he may send Jesus, who has been appointed for you as the Messiah."***

Because Jesus lives, Peter confidently spoke God's Word so Jesus could refresh their souls and wipe away their sins. Because Jesus lives, Peter confidently spoke of his Savior.

Sometimes you and I are like Peter, aren't we? An opportunity presents itself and you want to speak about Jesus. You want to share that message, but when you do, it feels like it all goes wrong. Something or someone interrupts. You get tongue-tied and feel like you can't answer their questions. Maybe they react negatively and object to what you have to say, so you wilt. Fear silences your desire to share the gospel. Uncertainty creeps in and your mind races to make excuses. Before too long, you're like Peter and the other disciples hiding behind locked doors avoiding any opportunity to share the gospel.

...But then through his Word, through his Supper, through his gospel, the risen Jesus comes into your fear and uncertainty. The fact of Jesus' resurrection brushes all those excuses aside as he tells you, "Look at my hands and feet and side! Listen to all those witnesses who saw and heard me alive! Look into the tomb and find only emptiness there! See what I have done for you! See how I have died and yet have risen from the dead! I live, and so will you! Your fear and uncertainty? Let me take that from you. Your worry about what to say or how to say it? Let me help you. In fact, I'll even send my Holy Spirit to bless what you say so that the gospel passing through your fumbling, stumbling lips will still change hearts and lives—just as it has changed yours!"

Then you go back out into the world and the Lord presents you with an opportunity to speak about him. Will you wilt? Will you keep your mouth shut? Will you change the subject or will you speak of what have seen and heard from God's Word, of what you believe because Jesus lives?

The fact that Jesus lives changes everything! Because Jesus lives, when God gives you an opportunity to speak, you can confidently give glory to God for all his mighty deeds—not just the big, obvious ones, but even how he brought you to faith through the hearing of his Word and how that has changed your life. Because Jesus lives, when God gives you the opportunity to speak, you can confidently speak the hard words that need to be spoken.

You can have the tough conversation calling sin sin because Jesus lives and you want that person to enjoy the forgiveness and true freedom you enjoy in Christ.

Because Jesus lives, when God gives you the opportunity to speak, you can confidently point to Christ as the solution to salvation. You can tell of what he has done for you and how his life, his death, and his resurrection changed your life and your eternity forever. Because Jesus lives, when God gives you the opportunity to speak, you can confidently speak what people need to hear. You see, on their own, people wander through this life like they're lost in a desert desperately in need of what satisfies. They're already lost, already headed for the wastelands of hell. You can't make it worse. That's why we need to speak. The living Jesus refreshes souls and wipes away sin. He is the only source of life, so we share him with others.

Jesus lives! Now that doesn't mean that we will suddenly become more comfortable speaking with strangers or that having the conversations we need to have with people will get easier. Yet because Jesus lives, you and I can have those conversations with other people. You and I can be confident to speak that message that changes eternities. With such faith-filled confidence to speak, our message can be simple. It is powerful and effective because this is our message: **CIR HIRI!** Amen.