

Acts 4:32-37 + Fellowship for the Family + Series: Jesus Lives! So What?
Cross of Christ Ev. Lutheran Church – Liverpool, NY + 5th Sunday of Easter + 29 April 2018

CIR HIRI!¹

“A picture is worth a thousand words.” Since the earliest permanent images were taken back in the mid-1830s, people have taken pictures to capture moments and memories and everything in between. Snapshots capture a moment in time, whether that’s the stiff portraits and blurry scenes of the 19th century or the trillions of digital pictures taken on smartphones and instantly shared on social media every day.² Yet it’s more than simply capturing a moment in time.

Pull out old pictures and what do you notice? Maybe you notice the hairstyles or the fashion choices or the vintage furniture in the background. Perhaps if you’re in the picture, it brings back a memory of what once was or calls to mind a story shared ever since. Pictures make you think how much life has changed and how much life remains the same. In fact, through those pictures, you can learn where you came from and who you are. You can learn so much about your family, your history, and life in general.

In his Word, the Lord also shares “snapshots” meant to give us a glimpse at a moment in Bible history or to teach us God’s saving truth. Through them, we learn what it means to be the family of God’s people made holy in the blood of Christ. This morning we’ll see the impact that Christ’s resurrection had on the earliest Christians and the impact it has on us today.

Sometimes snapshots capture major events or moments in history. In that moment, an iconic image is formed that impacts how we view that historical event ever after. For example, the image of the Marines raising the American flag on Mt. Suribachi on the island of Iwo Jima reminds us today of the Allied victory in WWII. Yet during the war, that image bolstered American morale to finish the war. Some images capture great sadness—images like those following the assassinations of John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King or the destruction of the World Trade Center towers in NYC. Others capture great joy—like the return of prisoners of war from Vietnam, the fall of the Berlin Wall, or the Chicago Cubs winning the World Series in 2016.

In a way, you could describe the early chapters of Luke’s book of Acts as iconic snapshots of the birth of the Christian church 2,000 years ago. You see an image of the Apostle Peter flanked by the other apostles standing before a crowd of thousands on the festival day of Pentecost. They aren’t melting before the ridicule of those who thought the disciples were drunk. No, you see them boldly proclaiming the risen Jesus and calling the people to repent with the Holy Spirit leading 3,000 people to be baptized that day. You see another image of Peter and John standing in the temple courts before a paralyzed man begging for money. You see Peter offer not money, but the good news of the risen Jesus giving the paralyzed man the ability to walk and leap and run. You see another image of Peter boldly proclaiming the risen Jesus to a growing crowd as the Holy Spirit leads thousands more to Christ.

You see yet another image of Peter and John standing before the Jewish Supreme Court known as the Sanhedrin, not cowering before the threats of those who had condemned Jesus just months before. Instead you see the Lord use Peter’s bold proclamation of the risen Jesus to disarm Christ’s enemies. All they can do is tell the disciples to stop proclaiming the risen Jesus before setting them free, only making the Christians bolder.

You see these iconic images of the apostles at the birth of the Christian church boldly testifying to the resurrection of Jesus. You see them testify **“with great power,”** while the Lord pours out **“great grace...on all of them.”** The more they testify, the more grace and blessing God pours out.

You see those iconic images of the Church’s history, but what was going in the family of God? What did their life look like? Sometimes snapshots capture not an iconic moment in history, but life as it once was. Think back to the countless family pictures taken over the years that you and your loved ones possess. They won’t make the cover of a magazine or headline a website, but they capture life in your family no matter when they were taken.

The images that Luke captures for us in Acts 4 aren’t so much focused on the apostles who often operated in the public eye. Instead, you see life among ordinary, common Christians, people in the background, people really

¹ “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!”

² <https://www.thesprucecrafts.com/brief-history-of-photography-2688527>

no different than you and me today. So what was life like? Clearly the apostles were powerfully testifying to the resurrection of Christ, but what impact did that have on the family of God? On God's people?

You see the Christian church, the family of God grow by leaps and bounds as the Lord was bringing hundreds and thousands of souls into his family. You see people of every level of Jewish society becoming Christians—rich and poor, young and old, native Jews and former Gentiles.

You see the Lord bless his people as the truth of the resurrection was being proclaimed, but that doesn't mean things were easy. They were starting to face some outside opposition, but there were also challenges in their midst. There were people in genuine need who were becoming Christians. They needed help. How did the Lord help them? He moved the hearts and minds of their brothers and sisters in Christ to live the self-sacrificing love of Christ.

Luke describes the situation, ***“All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of his possessions was his own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and much grace was upon them all. There were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned lands or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone as he had need.”*** In fact, one believer led the way with his generosity. ***“Joseph, a Levite from Cyprus, whom the apostles called Barnabas (which means Son of Encouragement), sold a field he owned and brought the money and put it at the apostles' feet.”***

Look at the impact that Christ's resurrection had on the family of God! You see selflessness. You see sharing in its purest form this side of heaven. You see a common bond of unity in heart and mind that you can't find anywhere else. You see self-sacrificing, others-first, God-pleasing stewardship of the various gifts that God had given to his people. You see grace in action as people of every stripe look outside of themselves with Christ-like love.

You don't see the selfishness and self-centeredness that comes so naturally to all of us. You don't see individuals trying to take advantage of others or spending their time, talents, or hard-earned treasures on themselves. You don't see people grumbling or complaining or grudgingly giving with a tight fist. You don't see people promoting themselves, but seeking what's best for every individual soul in the family of God. You see how the gospel, the good news of Christ's resurrection changes hearts, changes minds, changes attitudes, changes perspectives, changes worldviews. You see people who realize that their worth was not in what they owned, but in the grace Christ had shown them through his death for their sins and his rising from the dead.

Nothing that you see in this image was forced or required or commanded. People sold a field or a house and gave some or all of the proceeds to help their needy brothers and sisters in Christ. No one was selling off everything to become a monastic or to earn God's favor or to create some communistic utopia. No, you see how God's great grace in the risen Christ demonstrates itself in the life of his family of faith, in the fellowship he creates among people.

That snapshot was taken 2,000 years ago. So much history has passed under the bridge since then. If Luke were to take a snapshot of our modern congregation, what would he see? Does the resurrection of Jesus Christ still have the same impact on you and me and the rest of the family of God today? Would such a snapshot show selfless, self-sacrificing love empowered and enabled by the risen Savior's selfless love for us? Would we see grace in action in our own unique setting in the church's history?

I would hope so, but I know my own sinful heart and you know yours. By nature, I'm selfish, always wanting to do what's best for me, spending my time, my talents, my treasures on what I think I deserve. I want what others have. I don't always appreciate what great grace God is demonstrating in the lives of his people through the gospel. I grumble and complain when asked to help or to sacrifice my time or talents or treasures for the sake of others who need them. I fail to be a Barnabas—a son of encouragement and consolation. So hypocrisy and selfish ambition come all too easily.

Yet do you remember how the gospel changed those sinful people from so many different cultures and families and social strata? Remember how the truth of the resurrection, preached with the power of God, changed hearts and minds and lives and perspectives forever? The same gospel, preached with the power of God and testified to us from the pages of Scripture, has changed our hearts and minds and lives and worldviews too!

The resurrection of Jesus has a profound effect on how you view the world, how you view what you possess, and how you view others. The resurrection of Jesus helps you see others as souls for whom Christ laid down

his life and took it back up again. The resurrection of Jesus helps you to see your time, your talents, your treasures as gifts God has given to you to be used, to be shared selflessly helping others to grow. It's a little like something the character Dolly Levi says in the musical, "Hello Dolly," ***"Money, pardon the expression, is like manure. It's not worth a thing unless it's spread around, encouraging young things to grow."*** The point is that the resurrection of Jesus helps us to see what we own in a completely different light—as gifts given to be given rather than to be taken or hoarded.

The resurrection of Jesus helps you and me to be like Barnabas—not just leading by example and giving generously, but being sons and daughters of the Lord known for our encouragement, our comfort, and our consolation. Above all, the resurrection of Jesus accomplishes something that no world peace movement has ever approached. The resurrection of Jesus truly makes a body of all kinds of different people into the united family of God—***"heart and mind one."***

Someday when people look at the snapshots of this congregation in this place and in this time, what will they see? Will they see selfish hearts and minds snipping at one another and taking advantage of each other? Or will they see the family of God—yes, warts and all, yet a family in Christ united in heart and mind, selflessly serving and loving one another in the grace of God with the gospel of the resurrection of Jesus powerfully and boldly proclaimed? Will they see God's people consoling and encouraging and supporting one another in love? By God's grace, they will see this family of God united in Christ and living in the love produced by this unchangeable truth: **CIR HIRI!** Amen.