



***BIBLE STUDY for
the SECOND SUNDAY OF EASTER***



Focus text: Acts 5: 27 - 32

Additional texts: Psalm 118: 14 - 29; Revelation 1: 4 - 8; John 20: 19 - 31

The story of the apostles' trial before the Sanhedrin comes on the heels of their miraculous escape from prison. This motif of escape from prison is a familiar theme in the book of Acts, including in chapter 12 where an angel assists Peter's jailbreak. Later in chapter 15, Paul and Silas break free from a prison at Philippi.

The literary context of this story highlights the significance of the apostles' actions—teaching and healing ministry—that led to their imprisonment. Peter and John were warned twice by the elders and the high priest not to continue their teaching ministry (4:17-18). They are at it again, this time in the temple court, having just escaped from prison. From the perspectives of the authorities, Peter and the apostles have become repeat offenders. But what exactly was their offense?

What got Peter and other apostles in trouble were their healing miracles and their insistence that Jesus was the only name by which humankind could be saved (4:10, 12). Peter refers to Jesus again in this passage as the ruler and saviour. From a Roman perspective, Augustus Caesar was the sole saviour of the world. The authorities who were deeply invested in depicting the emperor as the only saviour likely saw Peter's words as a challenge to, and a mockery of, royal titles. Jesus, from their perspective, was an imposter whose name should not be associated with the titles the emperor had rightfully earned.

Whereas the Roman emperor would have exercised absolute power in order to maintain his status, Jesus sacrificed his power and status in the process of bringing salvation to everyone. Unlike the Roman emperor's abuse of power and violence that allowed him to claim the title of saviour, it was Jesus' crucifixion, an act of solidarity with the marginalised, which made him the saviour. The emperor might have undeservedly claimed the title of saviour for himself but, in truth, it was Jesus who lived up to that title. This makes the emperor, not Jesus, an imposter.

Within the context of this story, it was also their healing ministry and the practice of sharing possessions among members that enhanced the apostles' popularity and landed them in trouble. Whereas the empire turned a blind eye to the needs of the disadvantaged, the apostles brought them healing. Whereas the Roman Empire fostered an ethos of hoarding and acquiring wealth at the expense of the poorest, the Jesus movement was promoting an alternative worldview—an ethos of sharing possessions.

Peter's insistence that they will obey divine authority rather than humans (5:29) is reminiscent of 4:19 where he and John defied officials by forcefully articulating their obligation to preach what they had witnessed.

And their escape from prison suggests that the new movement will not be curtailed or limited by human institutions or structures. God's word transcends the power of human authorities. This story of Peter, just like the one in the previous chapter, speaks to the resilience and indomitable spirit of the Jesus movement. That is Good News.

(From Working Preacher website)

The abuse of power and corruption by the Roman Empire was challenged by the Jesus movement.

- Will I challenge worldviews and institutions that do not promote justice, compassion and healing to those who are broken?
- Am I willing to speak out against corruption that I witness in my workplace or community?
- What actions can I take to ensure an ethos of sharing in my community?
- How can I be part of Good News?

Let us pray

*Open our hearts Lord , to your power
moving around us and between us and within us,
until your glory is revealed
in our love of both friend and enemy,
in communities transformed
by justice and compassion,
and in the healing of all that is broken.*

Amen

