

Sermon followed by Service - August 3, 2025 - Acts 4:23-35

Just over 10 years ago, in Charleston, South Carolina, a gunman walks into a church, sits in on a Bible Class, and then shoots 9 people dead. Imagine it's your church and your friends, your church family, that was shot. What do you want to do? ... what do you want to say?

What do we want to do? We want to make him pay. We want justice, the kind of justice that says: "Never again!"

What do we want to say? Some days we might want to say: "I hope you burn in hell!" To God, we might want to say: "Why, God? What are you doing, God? God, don't you care?"

In Charleston, they prayed for the gunman's forgiveness. Not a normal response, is it? In our lesson, what we hear isn't a normal response either. In Jerusalem, after Peter and John were thrown into jail, after they were ordered by the state not to preach or teach in the name of Jesus, what did Christ's church say and do? They don't go on the warpath. They don't shout out against God. And they don't wring their hands, pull out their hair, or give up on God either. (Oh, that could be so easy when it seems that God has lost.) Instead, Christ's church in Jerusalem, your brothers and sisters raise up a sound. All together they praise God: **"Sovereign Lord, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them! You've heard the threats against us. Make us strong, make us bold to speak up and speak out with Jesus!"**

I don't know about you, but I think that right there is more amazing, more miraculous than Peter healing the crippled man to walk and jump. It would have been so easy for that church to turtle and hide. So easy to quit and complain. So easy to turn hard and hateful and angry. But they didn't! Filled with the Spirit, filled with Jesus, they don't whine. They don't complain. They don't pray for God's judgment. They don't pray that their enemies be stopped, that the persecution be stopped, that their enemies be silenced. No, they praise God and pray that God would make them strong and bold to share the word of Jesus!

And what did God do? I wish I could tell you God silenced their enemies, stopped the persecution, and cleared the way for his church to work in peace. I wish I could say that, but it wouldn't be true. God did draw the line on what his enemies could say and do, but I'm not sure we'd always agree with where he drew his line - but we'll save that sermon for later this month. Instead of simply silencing his enemies, God answered the prayer of his church. By his Spirit he made his church strong and bold to speak up and speak out with the word of Jesus.

Can I show you something else that amazes me in our lesson? **“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.”** When Satan puts the squeeze on people, it can be easy for the squeezed to let their hearts turn hard. It might be fear of what the enemy will do ... it might be some thoughtless instinct for self-preservation or some cold-hearted calculating for self-preservation. Whatever the reason, when Satan puts the squeeze on us, it can be so easy to let our

hearts turn hard. It might be the thought of protecting ourselves that makes our hearts hard, or it could be we see the fight that Jesus is giving us. We need to be bold. We need to be strong. We need to speak up. We need to say what needs to be said. We need to fight for what Jesus says. And we set ourselves so much on the fight that we set our hearts hard.

But our brothers and sisters in Jerusalem, they were both strong to speak up and soft, kind-hearted to care. They were strong for the fight, but even stronger in their love. They didn't let their hearts become hard, but they cared for each other. They didn't count the cost, but they counted each other as more important than the stuff they had.

How could they do that? How could they be so giving? How could they be so trusting when Satan was punching them in the gut, looking to crush them out? They knew who the players were, and they knew the outcome. That same thing is true for us. We're part of the same church. We're on the same team. We know the players and we know the outcome. For example, who are the chief priests and rulers in our lesson and whoever else tries to silence us as Christ's church? They are all like Herod and Pontius Pilate. They might talk big, but some day they will be on their knees before Jesus. They might talk big, but God is bigger. They might talk big, but God has them in his power and he will work his purpose.

So when the chief priests and rulers and whoever else tries to silence us in Christ's church, what do we do? We lift up our voices. We praise God as the maker of heaven and earth, and everything in them! We see God as our brothers and sisters in heaven see him - as ruler of heaven and earth. We see God in charge, in complete control, working his will through Jesus - no matter who is against him.

And we see ourselves as his slaves. Slaves - that's a hard word, isn't it? Our brothers and sisters didn't think so. They saw themselves belonging to God, no questions, no limits, no holding back. They didn't claim any right to ease or comfort; they didn't claim any right to self-determination or the pursuit of happiness. No "It's my life," instead, "Thy will be done!" They saw themselves as belonging to God for God to work his purpose ... and they knew God would work his purpose, no doubt about it.

That doesn't mean they saw themselves as pawns to be pushed around by God and lost. They saw themselves winning with God. Why? They saw Jesus. On the one hand, they saw Jesus standing before that absolute God, judged guilty by God, taking the hits for our failures. They saw Jesus stretched out on the cross before God paying the price for our guilt. And on the other hand, they saw Jesus taking on Satan and breaking his power. They saw Jesus bloodied, but not broken. They saw Jesus dead, but no longer dead. They saw Jesus alive proclaiming peace with the all-powerful God. They saw Jesus alive proclaiming victory and promising life with the all-powerful God.

We get to see Jesus that same way. Like our brothers and sisters in heaven, no matter what evil gets thrown at the church, we know the outcome. God will get his way. Jesus will win. And not just that. With Jesus, like our brothers and sisters in heaven, we will win.

It makes a difference when we see ourselves that way, doesn't it? Instead of praying as victims, we pray as winners. Instead of living with a hard shell around our hearts, we live like we know we're safe with God; we're set with God. Instead of just looking out for ourselves, we're safe and set to look out for each other. It makes a difference when we see ourselves winning with Jesus, doesn't it? So the next time you feel the church take a hit ... the next time you see a brother or sister in need ... look up to Jesus - we get to pray like winners and we get to share love like we have Jesus! Amen.

August 2 & 3, 2025

SERVICE OF WORD AND SACRAMENT

IN OUR WORLD TODAY ... we witness and experience so many reasons to be disappointed and discouraged, angry and afraid - to feel let down and upset with God.

IN OUR WORSHIP TODAY ... we see how a Spirit-Filled Church responds to adversity - with prayer and praise!

OPENING HYMN

"All Praise to God Who Reigns Above"

Hymn 603

All praise to God who reigns above, the God of all creation,
the God of wonders, pow'r, and love, the God of our salvation!
With healing balm my soul he fills, the God who ev'ry sorrow stills:
To God all praise and glory!

What God's almighty pow'r has made, in mercy he is keeping;
by morning dawn or evening shade his eye is never sleeping.
Within the kingdom of his might, all things are just and good and right:
to God all praise and glory!

I cried to him in time of need: Lord God, O hear my calling!
For death he gave me life indeed and kept my feet from falling.
For this my thanks shall endless be; O thank him, thank our God with me:
to God all praise and glory!

The Lord will not forsake his flock, his chosen generation;
he is their refuge and their rock, their peace and their salvation.
As with a mother's tender hand he leads his own, his chosen band:
to God all praise and glory!

All who confess Christ's holy name, to God give praise and glory!
Let all who know his pow'r proclaim aloud the wondrous story!
All idols under foot be trod — The Lord is God! The Lord is God!
To God all praise and glory!

INVOCATION

M: The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

+ CONFESSION OF SINS AND ABSOLUTION +

M: God invites us to come into his presence and worship him with humble and penitent hearts. Therefore, let us acknowledge our sinfulness and ask him to forgive us.

C: **Holy and merciful Father, I confess that I am by nature sinful, and that I have disobeyed you in my thoughts, words, and actions. I have done what is evil and failed to do what is good. For this I deserve your punishment both now and in eternity. But I am truly sorry for my sins, and trusting in my Savior Jesus Christ, I pray: Lord, have mercy on me, a sinner.**

M: God, our heavenly Father, has been merciful to us and has given his only Son to be the atoning sacrifice for our sins. Therefore, as a called servant of Christ and by his authority, I forgive you all your sins in the name of the Father and of the Son † and of the Holy Spirit. **Amen.**

+ PRAYER AND PRAISE +

LORD, HAVE MERCY

M: For all that we need in life and for the wisdom to use all your gifts with gratitude and joy, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: For the steadfast assurance that nothing can separate us from your love and for the courage to stand firm against the assaults of Satan and every evil, hear our prayer, O Christ.

C: **Christ, have mercy.**

M: For the well-being of your holy Church in all the world and for those who offer here their worship and praise, hear our prayer, O Lord.

C: **Lord, have mercy.**

M: Merciful God, maker and preserver of life, uphold us by your power and keep us in your tender care:

C: **Amen.**

M: The works of the Lord are great and glorious; his name is worthy of praise.

HYMN (No Introduction)

“O Lord, Our Lord”

Hymn 939

Refrain

O Lord, our Lord, how glorious is your name in all the earth.

Almighty God, merciful Father, you crown our life with your love.

You take away our sin; you comfort our spirit;

you make us pure and holy in your sight.

You did not spare your only Son,

but gave him up for us all. *Refrain*

O Son of God, eternal Word of the Father,

you came to live with us;

you made your Father known;

you washed us from our sins in your own blood.

You are the King of glory; you are the Lord! *Refrain*

PRAYER OF THE DAY

Lord, keep your household, the church, in continual godliness, and set us free from all adversities that, under your protection, we may serve you with true devotion and holy deeds; through your Son, Jesus Christ our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. **Amen.**

FIRST READING

Acts 4:23–31

On their release, Peter and John went back to their own people and reported all that the chief priests and the elders had said to them. When they heard this, they raised their voices together in prayer to God.

“Sovereign Lord,” they said, “you made the heavens and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. You spoke by the Holy Spirit through the mouth of your servant, our father David:

“ ‘Why do the nations rage
and the peoples plot in vain?
The kings of the earth rise up
and the rulers band together against the Lord
and against his anointed one.’

Indeed Herod and Pontius Pilate met together with the Gentiles and the people of Israel in this city to conspire against your holy servant Jesus, whom you anointed. They did what your power and will had decided beforehand should happen. Now, Lord, consider their threats and enable your servants to speak your word with great boldness. Stretch out your hand to heal and perform signs and wonders through the name of your holy servant Jesus.”

After they prayed, the place where they were meeting was shaken. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke the word of God boldly.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

PSALM OF THE DAY

Psalm 142A

Refrain



I cry a-loud to the LORD; I raise my voice to God; I
cry a-loud to the LORD, my God: LORD, have mer-cy.

Tone



In the path / where I walk
people have hidden a / snare for me.
Look and see—no one is con- / cerned for me.
I have no refuge; no one cares / for my life.

I cry to you, LORD; I say, “You are my / refuge,
my portion in the land of the / living.”
Listen to my cry, for I am in / desp’rate need;
rescue me from those who pur- / sue me. *Refrain*

Set me free from my / prison,
that I may / praise your name.
Then the righteous will gather a- / bout me
because of your good- / ness to me.

**Glory be to the Father and / to the Son
and to the Holy / Spirit,
as it was in the be- / ginning,
is now, and will be forever. / Amen. *Refrain***

SECOND READING

Acts 4:32–35

All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. With great power the apostles continued to testify to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And God’s grace was so powerfully at work in them all that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles’ feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had need.

The Word of the Lord. **Thanks be to God.**

GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

Alleluia. My word will not return to me empty, but will accomplish what I desire and achieve the purpose for which I sent it. Alleluia.

GOSPEL

Luke 8:4–8, 11–15

While a large crowd was gathering and people were coming to Jesus from town after town, he told this parable: “A farmer went out to sow his seed. As he was scattering the seed, some fell along the path; it was trampled on, and the birds ate it up. Some fell on rocky ground, and when it came up, the plants withered because they had no moisture. Other seed fell among thorns, which grew up with it and choked the plants. Still other seed fell on good soil. It came up and yielded a crop, a hundred times more than was sown.”

When he said this, he called out, “Whoever has ears to hear, let them hear.”

“This is the meaning of the parable: The seed is the word of God. Those along the path are the ones who hear, and then the devil comes and takes away the word from their hearts, so that they may not believe and be saved. Those on the rocky ground are the ones who receive the word with joy when they hear it, but they have no root. They believe for a while, but in the time of testing they fall away. The seed that fell among thorns stands for those who hear, but as they go on their way they are choked by life’s worries, riches and pleasures, and they do not mature. But the seed on good soil stands for those with a noble and good heart, who hear the word, retain it, and by persevering produce a crop.

The Gospel of the Lord. **Praise be to you, O Christ!**

HYMN OF THE DAY

“God of Grace and God of Glory”

Hymn 770

God of grace and God of glory, on your people pour your pow’r;
crown your ancient Church’s story, bring its bud to glorious flow’r.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the facing of this hour,
for the facing of this hour.

Lo, the hosts of evil round us scorn the Christ, assail his ways.
From the fears that long have bound us free our hearts to faith and praise.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage for the living of these days,
for the living of these days.

Cure your children's warring madness; bend our pride to your control;
shame our wanton, selfish gladness, rich in things and poor in soul.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage lest we miss your kingdom's goal,
lest we miss your kingdom's goal.

Save us from weak resignation to the evils we deplore;
let the gift of your salvation be our glory evermore.
Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, serving you whom we adore,
serving you whom we adore.

SERMON

Acts 4:23-35

NICENE CREED

We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth, of all that is, seen and unseen.

We believe in one Lord, Jesus Christ, the only Son of God, eternally begotten of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of one being with the Father. Through him all things were made. For us and for our salvation, he came down from heaven, was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and the Virgin Mary, and became truly human. For our sake he was crucified under Pontius Pilate. He suffered death and was buried. On the third day he rose again in accordance with the Scriptures. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again in glory to judge the living and the dead, and his kingdom will have no end.

We believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life, who proceeds from the Father and the Son, who in unity with the Father and the Son is worshiped and glorified, who has spoken through the prophets.

We believe in one holy Christian and apostolic Church. We acknowledge one baptism for the forgiveness of sins. We look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come. Amen.

OFFERING PRAYER

Lord, you made the heaven and the earth and the sea, and everything in them. By your Spirit, give us the heart of your Acts 4 church – to see you as our generous Father and Master, to see ourselves as your cared-for children and servants. Help us to see your church and the world around us as opportunities for generous and bold living and giving. **Amen.**

OFFERING

If you prefer to give online, the code at the right will take you to our Online Giving page. We invite our online givers to join in our offering with an "I Give Online" card in the pew racks.



PRAYER OF THE CHURCH

Gracious God and Father, we praise you for the countless blessings, which we receive from your hand: the beauties of creation and the bounties of the earth, the joy of life and the pleasure of friendship, the good of work and the gift of rest, the privilege to share happiness and sorrow with one another. Above all we praise and thank you for your saving Word and for your Son's body and blood, which you give us to eat and to drink in the sacrament. Through these means of grace, you send the Holy Spirit into our hearts and unite us to Jesus and to the whole Christian Church on earth. **Strengthen us through this heavenly food; increase our trust in Christ and our love for one another.**

Great God and Lord, without your continuing help we easily waver in our faith, lose courage, and grow careless in our watchfulness. The times and days are perilous. Give us strength to face the evils of each day with fresh confidence. Open our lips to speak of your grace, and move us to use the gifts that you give us to share your Word of salvation with all people.

Protect and prosper the family, the school, the government, and all good institutions that you have established for the benefit of society. Remember in mercy those who are sick and suffering, and bring your healing to troubled homes and lives.

Move us to pray for those in need and to help them with deeds of kindness.

Special prayers and intercessions may follow.

Hear us, Lord, as we bring you our private petitions.

Silent prayer.

Now, eternal God and Father, keep us in the saving faith and so enable us to overcome all things through our Lord Jesus Christ.

LORD'S PRAYER

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name, thy kingdom come, thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread; and forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; and lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

THE SACRAMENT

(Guests, please see our communion practice on page 2.)

(Gluten-free wafers are available; ask Pastor.)

M: The Lord be with you.

C: **And also with you.**

M: Lift up your hearts.

C: **We lift them up to the Lord.**

M: Let us give thanks to the Lord our God.

C: **It is right to give him thanks and praise.**

M: Praise to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In love he has blessed us with every spiritual blessing. He sends the Holy Spirit to testify that we are his children and to strengthen us when we are weak.

Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ. To him who sits on the throne and to the Lamb be praise and thanks and honor and glory for ever and ever.

HOLY, HOLY, HOLY *Sanctus* (No Introduction) - Sung

Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of your glory. You are my God and I will exalt you. I will give you thanks for you have become my salvation. Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts. The whole earth is full of your glory.

WORDS OF INSTITUTION

M: Our Lord Jesus Christ, on the night he was betrayed, took bread; and when he had given thanks, he broke it and gave it to his disciples, saying, "Take and eat; this is my † body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me."

Then he took the cup, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, "Drink from it, all of you; this is my † blood of the new covenant, which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. Do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

M: The peace of the Lord be with you always. **Amen.**

O CHRIST, LAMB OF GOD *Agnus Dei* (No Introduction) – Sung

O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; have mercy on us. O Christ, Lamb of God, you take away the sin of the world; grant us your peace. Amen.

The Church's one foundation is Jesus Christ, her Lord;
she is his new creation by water and the Word.
From heav'n he came and sought her to be his holy bride;
with his own blood he bought her, and for her life he died.

Elect from ev'ry nation, yet one o'er all the earth;
her charter of salvation: one Lord, one faith, one birth.
One holy name she blesses, partakes one holy food,
and to one hope she presses, with ev'ry grace endued.

The Church shall never perish. Her dear Lord, to defend,
to guide, sustain, and cherish, is with her to the end.
Tho' there be those that hate her and strive to see her fail,
against both foe and traitor she ever shall prevail.

Tho' with a scornful wonder the world sees her oppressed,
by schisms rent asunder, by heresies distressed,
yet saints their watch are keeping; their cry goes up, "How long?"
and soon the night of weeping shall be the morn of song.

Mid toil and tribulation and tumult of her war
she waits the consummation of peace forevermore
till with the vision glorious her longing eyes are blest,
and the great Church victorious shall be the Church at rest.

CLOSING PRAYER

M: Hear the prayer of your people, O Lord, that the lips which have praised you here may glorify you in the world, that the eyes which have seen the coming of your Son may long for his coming again, and that all who have received in his true body and blood the pledge of your forgiveness may be restored to live a new and holy life, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever.

Amen.

BLESSING

M: Brothers and sisters, go in peace. Live in harmony with one another.
Serve the Lord with gladness.

The Lord bless you and keep you.

The Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you.

The Lord look on you with favor and give you peace. **Amen.**

CLOSING HYMN

“Rise! To Arms! With Prayer Employ You”

Hymn 871

Rise! To arms! With prayer employ you,
O Christians, lest the foe destroy you,
for Satan has designed your fall. Wield God’s Word, a weapon glorious;
against each foe you’ll be victorious, for God will set you o’er them all.
Fear not the prince of hell, here is Immanuel! Sing hosanna!
The strong ones yield to Christ, our shield,
and we as conqu’rors hold the field.

Cast afar this world’s vain pleasure and boldly strive for heav’nly treasure.
Be steadfast in the Savior’s might. Trust the Lord, who stands beside you,
for Jesus from all harm will hide you. By faith you’ll conquer in the fight.
Take courage, weary soul! Look forward to the goal! Joy awaits you.
The race, then, run; your battle done, the crown of glory will be won.

Jesus, all your children cherish, and keep them that they never perish
whom you have purchased with your blood. Let new life to us be given
that we may look to you in heaven whenever fearful is our mood.
Your Spirit on us pour that we may love you more, hearts o’erflowing;
and then shall we, from sin set free, sing praise through all eternity.

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BIBLE INFORMATION CLASS STARTING UP

Are you ready for a refresher course in the basic teachings of the Bible? Maybe you haven't reviewed the six chief parts of Christian doctrine (Ten Commandments, Apostles' Creed, Lord's Prayer, Holy Baptism, Office of the Keys and Confession, Holy Communion) since you were confirmed years ago. Maybe you know of someone who is not yet ready to commit to worshipping at St. John, but inviting them to a small-group study about our beliefs would be a great beginning step.

If you are interested in attending the next sessions of lessons or know of someone else who might be interested in this 18-lesson course, please contact Mr. Retzlaff and let him know. He would like to create a list of possible participants so that he can set up a time to meet that will work best. Classes will begin the week of August 17. Sessions can be in-person or virtual. It currently looks like Monday evenings might be best, but that is tentative based on responses of those interested. (david.retzlaff@stjohnslib.com or 612.381.4355).