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Acts 2:14, 36-47
WILL WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR OWN ACTIONS?

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"You murdered the very Son of God!" Wow! Could it get any more in your face than this? Peter was preaching to the crowd on Pentecost. People were there from all over the world to celebrate the festival of harvest. There had been rumblings about something that had happened a little less than two months before. Jesus of Nazareth, a man that many considered a prophet and even more was killed by crucifixion and supposedly rose from the dead. Was this true? There was no doubt about the crucifixion, but the resurrection was another matter. People were talking.

They would be talking a lot more. There were strange things happening. There was the sound of a mighty wind, but there was no wind. The men who were called apostles had what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on their heads. Finally these unschooled Galileans started to speak in other languages that they had never learned or studied. That would draw a crowd and a very large one.

Then a man named Peter got up to preach a sermon and what a sermon it was! He assured the people that he and his companions were drunk as some were complaining. This was something that God had prophesied long ago. Peter would tell the people about this Jesus of Nazareth. He would bring in Old Testament passages that the people were familiar with and assure them that these passages were fulfilled in Jesus. Yes, Jesus died and yes, Jesus rose again from the dead. Peter and the other apostles were witnesses of the resurrection. They had seen the risen Jesus!

Now comes the kicker! "Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ!" Peter was saying that each and every individual there was guilty of killing the very Son of God. Throughout the centuries people have debated the question: Who really was responsible for the death of Jesus? There are so many possibilities, aren't there? You have the members of the Sanhedrin who hated Jesus. They saw him as a threat to their own power. They were afraid that Jesus would really mess things up. They thought of the Messiah only as a political and military hero who would lead a rebellion against the Romans and lose and they would lose their power over the people of Israel. You have Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor, who in spite of seeing Jesus as innocent of all charges, actually signed the death warrant to save his own skin. You have the Roman soldiers that carried out that crucifixion. You have the members of the mob who kept out shouting, "Crucify him! Crucify him!" I suppose that these were the principal players in this drama.

But that was not what Peter was saying. He was telling the people that each one of them was responsible for crucifying the Son of God. I would imagine that many in the crowd immediately started thinking: "Me? How could I be guilty of killing Jesus? I wasn't in Jerusalem two months ago. I didn't even know who Jesus was. Oh, I heard of him a time or two, but I wasn't there. He must be talking about someone else."

We can understand that, can't we? We always want to blame someone else. It goes back to the very first sin. After Adam and Eve disobeyed God, they tried to pass the buck. Adam blamed Eve and indirectly God for giving him his wife. Eve tried to blame the serpent. God called them to accountability. Little children will try to blame their brother, sister, friend or even the dog for their actions. As we get older, we blame our spouse, a coworker, neighbor or even total strangers for our actions. It's never our fault. We always want to have an excuse. We always want to shift the blame. I pose to you the question: WILL WE TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR OUR OWN ACTIONS?

"You murdered the very Son of God!" I'm not talking about Peter's sermon here and his listeners. I'm talking to you today. Now maybe you're starting to get angry. How can that be possible? Jesus died 2000 years ago. I wasn't around then. Besides that, I love Jesus. I would never want to hurt him, much less kill him. If I had been there when Jesus died, I would have stood up for him. I would have been there rebuking the crowd. We'd like to think that, but would it have been different?

We are guilty of murdering the very Son of God. That is the bad news and we have to hear the bad news before we can hear the good news. The more that we try to tone down the bad news and shift the blame to others, the less we can appreciate the love, the forgiveness, the peace and the joy of the Gospel. When our Lord Jesus was on the cross he prayed, "Father, forgive them, because they don't know what they are doing!" Yes, who are the "them?" Is it merely the people who were there shouting and mocking and spitting and beating? Or is it every human being, including us?

If you don't want to admit your sin and guilt, then you really don't want what Jesus came to do in providing the forgiveness of sins. We will not really appreciate the forgiveness that Christ won for us. Then we simply think of ourselves as pretty good people who sometimes do bad things, but generally are better than most others. Jesus is kind of our buddy that we stop and see every now and then, but he is not someone that we need in our lives each and every day.

As Peter spoke these words, he was not speaking like the Pharisees who looked down on everyone else. Peter was including himself as guilty. He knew his sins well. He remembered his denials of Jesus at the High Priest's courtyard. He remembered the time that Jesus called him "Satan" because he tried to deter Jesus from going to Jerusalem to be crucified. He remembered the time he walked on water and then looked away from Jesus and began to sink. Thomas would remember when he refused to believe that Jesus was alive and demanded physical proof of the resurrection. The other apostles would remember how they all ran away in the Garden of Gethsemane and how foolish they were to be constantly fighting about which of them loved Jesus the most and which of them were the greatest in the Kingdom of God. They knew their sins and they knew the power of forgiveness from their risen Lord!

So you ask the question: "Why didn't Peter use the word 'we' in his sermon? Is he trying to make people think that he himself was not a sinner?" Absolutely not! He knew his sins well. He would not try to deny that he had some very shameful moments, especially during those crucial three days when he hurt our Lord in his words and his actions.

Peter uses the word "you" because every one of us has to search his heart and see his sin. If someone is speaking to you in a crowd, you may or may not think that the message is intended for you. But if you are alone with no one else there and the same question is addressed, then you have to give a personal answer. That is what Peter intended. Every person in that crowd then and every person today must give an answer. Am I guilty of crucifying the very Son of God?

And if the answer is "yes" and I pray that it is, then there is some very good news for you. Jesus died for your sins and he has forgiven you. We know this because the Jesus who was crucified is both Lord and Christ. Jesus is Lord. He is true God. He set aside his divine power and glory for a time so that he could put himself under the very same law that condemns us and exposes our sins. He kept it perfectly in our behalf. Because he is God, his perfect obedience could count for all people. He would die for our sins. Once again because he is God, his atoning death could count for the sin of the world.

He is also Christ. He is the Anointed One, set apart for the very purpose of being our Savior. He is the perfect Prophet, High Priest and King that we all need. He is the very Messiah who was prophesied in the Scriptures. God the Father declared him his only-begotten Son whom he loved at both his baptism and on the Mount of Transfiguration.

The Father would exalt his Son to his right hand. He would give him the name that is above every name. This same Jesus would return to judge the living and the dead.

The people then were cut to the heart. They asked, “Brothers, what shall we do?” They didn’t make excuses. They didn’t say that Jesus was not the Christ. They didn’t try to blame someone else. They took responsibility for their own actions. They saw that their sins put Jesus on the cross. They saw rightly that they had killed the very Son of God. The Holy Spirit had done his work through the preaching of the Law.

Now the Holy Spirit would do his work though the preaching of the Gospel. “Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus for the forgiveness of your sins. And you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit!” You are the ones who crucified Jesus. And you are the ones who receive forgiveness of sins. That was God’s plan all along.

One of my favorite characters in the Lenten story is Barabbas. We don’t know all that much about him other than the fact that he was a murderer and was imprisoned. He was pardoned that Good Friday morning as someone would take his place on the third cross. That person was Jesus. It seems so unlikely. The people demanded the death of Jesus and were willing to let a murderer walk their streets and neighborhoods, but their hatred of Jesus was so intense.

The name Barabbas is interesting. It means “Son of the Father.” What did Barabbas look like? I see a picture of him every time I look in the mirror. By nature I was the son of the father. Unfortunately my father was Satan and he was not a good father. He urged me to lie and cheat and be selfish and hurt others by my words and actions. But now through Christ I have a new Father and a whole new identity. I am the murderer who went free while Jesus took my place. I am a redeemed child of God with an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade given to me by my brother Jesus. I live every day in the peace and joy that only Jesus can bring me and it will get even better in heaven!

How do we know that we have been adopted into God’s family and have a new Father? We have been baptized into Christ’s name. He gives us the forgiveness of sins and new life. We did nothing. God did everything. Your baptism certificate is the reminder that we all need that we are God’s precious children.

Jesus once said, “He who is forgiven little loves little and he who is forgiven much, loves much.” The more we see our sin and take responsibility for our own actions, the sweeter the message of Christ’s forgiveness. You crucified the very Son of God and God used that to bring you the forgiveness you needed! AMEN.